

The "Beast" has new playmates

As we set off from Preston at 0600hrs on 10th November with the Beast in tow Henry, Yvonne and I had mixed emotions. Alison who is also a syndicate member unfortunately could not join us. We were taking the Beast to its final resting place. No, not Hell, Lasham where the Gliding Heritage Centre is based.

What on earth do people who preserve Gulls, Scuds, and Primary gliders want with a YS53? Well it is not a Minimoa; but in terms of its rarity it is the only YS53 still flying probably the only one in existence, and it is the last British two seater to be manufactured. There is only one other T53 (the Slingsby manufactured earlier version) in the UK and that is owned by the Aviation Preservation Society of Scotland based at Portmoak. So in answer to the question when I offered to donate the glider to them they bit my hand off.

We have had a lot of fun with the glider, wave flying, entering the two seater comp, flying friends and frightening people with the Beast spin. Unfortunately a shrinking syndicate and not flying it enough meant that it was becoming less viable to operate. We did consider trying to sell it but, it didn't owe us much and we would have hated to read that some numpty had written it (and probably themselves) off. So we thought we would send it somewhere where the pilots are used to unusual flying characteristics and it would be pampered for its remaining years.

We arrived at Lasham via the wrong entrance (thanks Tom Tom) and had to be let in and escorted to the Heritage Hangar where we were met by an excited group of individuals. They gave us a brew and then we demonstrated the rigging process.

Due to the Beasts "interesting" spin characteristics and tendency to eat small children I wanted to fly with a couple of their senior people and show them what it was capable of. Even if I had to fly as P2 at Lasham, having not flown there before. No problem, they had set it up with the Lasham CFI that I would be demonstrating the glider and we just got on with it.

I first flew with Gary Pullen one of their senior Inspectors and instructor and a very knowledgeable guy, he was tall and we had to take out all the cushions. We had a 4000ft tow me warning him of impressive spin characteristics only to be let down and embarrassed yet again by the Beast. It hadn't finished having fun with us just yet! The spin was reasonably benign due to his weight. I then flew another senior Instructor and ex CFI Peter Molloy who asked for his regards to be passed to Bob Petrie, he was lighter and I was able to demonstrate a real Beast spin. I then gave him the glider but for some reason he elected not to spin it himself!

The afternoon was getting on and Yvonne wanted to fly. She conquered her Beast aerotow gremlin and also spun it herself. There was then just time for a final flight with one of their members Paul Halliday who could not wait to have a fly, we landed just as the sun was setting and as a Boeing 737 was waiting at the end of the runway to depart. Surreal!

A very successful afternoon and I had been allowed to instruct at the mecca of gliding and the three of us felt better about leaving the Beast there. They were so complementary about it and genuinely pleased to have it in the Heritage collection.

If anyone is down near Lasham I would recommend going to see the Heritage Centre they have a fantastic collection which they showed us with a brilliant guided tour with lots of rare or unique gliders, some are famous such as the one that holds the UK duration record at 33 hours 15 minutes. They already have enough gliders to fill the second hangar that they have already raised about two thirds of the required funds. Even better join them; it is only £24 and they are a great group and if suitably qualified you may get to fly some very interesting aircraft.

That evening they treated us to a meal in their clubhouse and we sat close to Peter Kynsey who is Chief Pilot of the Fighter Collection at Duxford, what an interesting man. All three of us also had to give an impromptu 30 second introduction or we would be fined! All funds to the hangar.

So the Beast has a new home and new friends to play with and a really great bunch of enthusiasts to take care of it. I just hope it behaves itself. I would be very embarrassed if they opened the Hangar doors one morning to find a bite out of the rudder of a priceless vintage glider!



The YS53 "Beast" in its new home alongside a Capstan and a Grunau, above it is a K3 (V tail) fore-runner to the K8 and the first glider with a metal tube fuselage.