

# FLYING IN EUROPE

A guide for the visiting general aviation pilot—part one of a two-part series

by ALAN BRAMSON



This typical village pub is set in the English countryside at Finchingfield, Essex.

■ ■ What is the state of light aviation in Europe, why has it grown at a modest rate compared to other parts of the world, and what can the American pilot expect if he wants to fly on this side of the Atlantic?

While general aviation is not new in Europe, it has long taken a back seat to ground transportation. For many years Europe has enjoyed a system of public ground transport far more comprehensive than anything in America, Africa or Australia—continents where light aviation has grown at a much faster rate. Furthermore, distances are usually very much shorter than what is considered normal in other areas—London to Paris, 215 miles; Paris to Geneva, 250 miles; Geneva to Madrid, 630 miles, for instance. And, within each country, inter-city journeys are even shorter.

It once used to be said, also, that the European weather was another inhibiting factor to the growth of this segment of aviation. But the advent of the European Common Market and the development of modern radio aids to navigation have combined to foster a resurgence in light aircraft activity.

In this first of a two-part series, then, we will examine the general aviation flying situation in Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

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## Britain

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Though sad to relate, there has not been a single air-minded government in Britain since WW II and this, coupled with the restrictive activities of successive aviation authorities, has resulted in the demise of our once buoyant and inventive light aircraft industry. Apart from a number of vintage types of British design, all light aircraft flying in the United Kingdom are of French, German, Italian or American manufacture.

Light aviation in Britain can best be described as growing at a steady if not spectacular rate. Notwithstanding our economic difficulties, flying training is thriving with the good schools making

real progress. The 200 or so training schools in Britain range from Mickey Mouse outfits to grand-scale operations. Professional pilots may only be trained at three schools approved for the purpose by the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority (the U.K. version of the FAA), and of these the Oxford Air Training School based near the famous university town is probably the biggest flying training establishment in the world. It handles multi-million dollar contracts for airlines in Japan, Greece, Switzerland and many other countries.

Obtaining a private pilot license in Britain represents an investment of \$1,000 to \$1,200 and, although each year some 8,000 make a start on gaining a license, the drop-out rate, for one reason or another, is high—a trait common to most countries. The requirements for a commercial pilot license (CPL) are tougher in the U.K. than most other countries. First, the student pilot must go to one of the three professional schools where the course for the CPL and IR (instrument rating) will relieve him of the best part of \$20,000. At some stage of the training he must fly twin-engine aircraft.

The other road to a CPL is to first amass 700 hours and to do this many young men in Britain train to become flying instructors (a 25-hour course backed by some 80 hours ground instruction). While we would not pretend that all flying schools are of a standard to be proud of, in varying degrees of professionalism, most outfits try and do an honest job.

There are many sporting activities during the season—air rallies to Malta and other parts of Europe, a "Dawn to Dusk" competition organized by the Tiger Club, and aerobatic events that attain very high standards. Then there are various air races, point-to-point and Formula 1. These are always well supported.

Britain is well endowed with navasids, air traffic control is first-class (if grossly overstaffed at aviation's expense) and most parts of the U.K. have an airfield or a private strip. A few of the major

airports (for example Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Edinburgh) belong to a state corporation known as the British Airports Authority. Avoid these like the plague. Landing and other fees charged by the BAA and the deliberate inconvenience so often caused to pilots of light aircraft using their facilities can only be regarded as open hostility and, while their public relations officer will deny this, at least he has the grace to admit British Airports Authority indifference to general aviation.

He could hardly do otherwise. Landing fees at non-BAA airports, and unfortunately there are only a few of these, are in the region of \$2.70 to \$3.60 for the average touring aircraft.

There is a lot to see in Britain and, contrary to what you may picture from your (and our) newspapers, people in general live well, the countryside is beautiful and, unlike another big city known to us all, London is solvent.

If you want to see things of aviation interest visit the Tiger Club at Redhill airfield and the Shuttleworth Collection of WW I aircraft in flying condition, the latter being but one of several collections of historic aircraft that may be seen. Whatever else do not miss Scotland. The countryside is superb and the people are among the nicest and most hospitable in the world.

The mainland of Europe is easily reached from Britain. There is a light aircraft corridor between Folkstone, South East England and Cap Gris-Nez in Northern France. At that point the English Channel is only some 22 miles across and pilots of single-engine aircraft are strongly advised to use it. Everything is laid on in the corridor for the pilot who runs out of magic while over the sea. Remember, few fixed undercarriage lightplanes ditch very satisfactorily.

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### Flying in France

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Of all the countries in Europe France is the most air-minded. It has a long aeronautical tradition which goes back beyond the first flight by man in 1783. That was when the Montgolfiers did their hot air thing, thereby thrusting



aviation upon the human race. Whereas in some countries it is only the enthusiasts who really love flying, the French have long since accepted the lightplane as one of the good things in life. As a nation they have enjoyed a succession of air-minded governments.

At the end of WW II the administration of the day bought from the British considerable numbers of war surplus Tiger Moths and other light aircraft for loan to the emerging aero clubs. At one time private owners received state assistance in cash when they purchased an airplane or fitted additional equipment. To this day youngsters below the age of 21 receive state assistance in gaining a private pilot license and the flying schools get a subsidy for each aircraft operated.

Of course, there are those who would say that since flying is a rich man's occupation why should the taxpayer assist in any way. I regret to say that this is the current British attitude, but in the final analysis it is only the facts that count, not opinion. And the facts are that Britain has to import all her light aircraft because she no longer builds them, while France not only builds, she also exports.

As a result, we have a situation in which Avions Robin of Dijon, a small family business, has captured 25% of the European single-engine market. In fact 50% of all modern, light singles flying in France are Robins. Other light-



The Louvre in Paris is one of the world's finest art galleries.

planes are built by Aerospatiale (partners with British Aircraft Corp. in Concorde), Reims Cessna and Wassmer who, among other types, are marketing a range of all-fiberglass four-seaters.

France is the touring pilot's dream come true. Even the smallest towns have

a nearby airstrip where you will receive a warm welcome. Only at the major airfields will you be charged landing fees. In addition, it is commonplace to find a restaurant serving the most delicious food, even when the airstrip is out in the sticks. Make no mistake, there is no

### General Flight Rules

#### Night flying

Britain, France, Belgium and Holland have separate night ratings with Belgium and Holland requiring an Instrument Rating before pilots may fly at night.

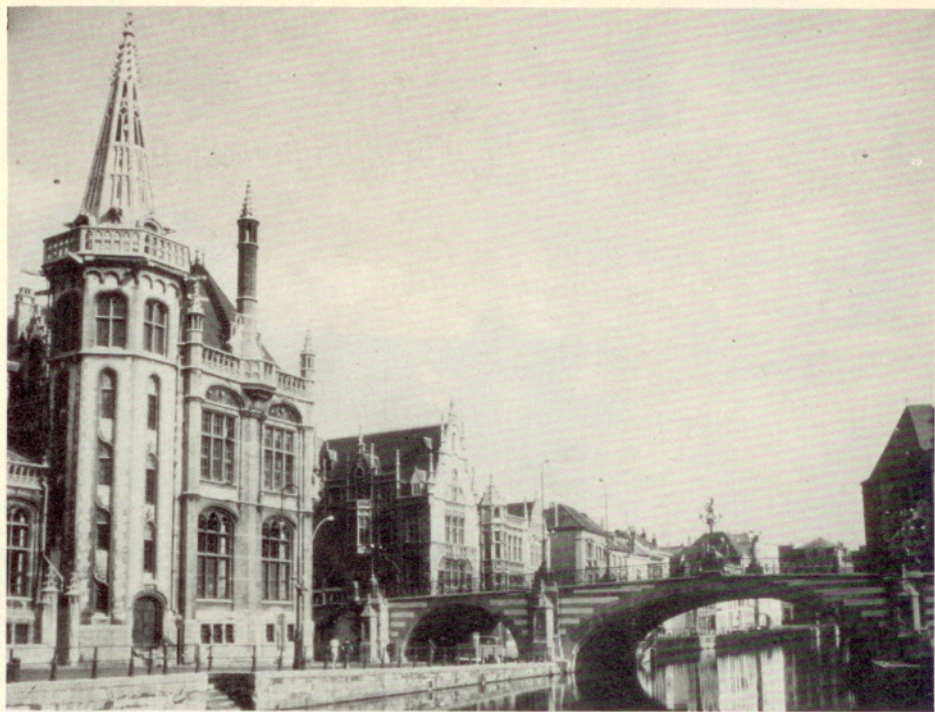
#### Instrument flying

Additional to the usual instrument rating arrangements Britain has the IMC (instrument meteorological conditions) rating requiring a simple course devoted to basic instrument flight without the use of nav aids. Holders of an IMC rating enjoy certain minor privileges not allowed the PPL-only pilots.

The full instrument rating must be taken on a twin if the pilot has a professional license. Nonprofessionals may do the PPL instrument rating on singles, but the test is to professional standards.

Country	Population (millions)	Number of private pilots	Number of light aircraft		Are foreign pilot licenses valid?	Can singles fly at night?
			Singles	Twins		
Britain	54	20,000	3,399	863	Yes, if ICAO	Yes
France	50	40,000	4,379	2,162	Yes, if ICAO	Yes
Belgium	9	1,250	608	62	Yes, if ICAO	Yes, with IR
Holland	11.5	1,850	305	33	Yes, non-commercial	Yes, with IR

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Historic Ghent is an old Belgian town of great character.

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food like that in France and the wines are the finest in the world.

French pilots with a minimum of 150 hours may train for an instrument rating, a course involving 40 hours in the air and 10 hours simulator time. There is a renewal test every year. Candidates for a flying instructor's rating must complete a 5-week course at the Carcassonne Centre but, unlike Britain, qualified instructors are not retested at intervals. In VMC (visual meteorological conditions—VFR) pilots without an IR may use the lower levels of the airways, an arrangement that, in our view, is sensible and a contribution towards safety.

They have some great air rallies in France. For pilots under the age of 21 there is the *Tour de France*. For those who enjoy a glass or two they run the *Rallye des vins d'Anjou*, where the aircraft are put to bed so the pilots may safely "take the waters" while, on a more serious note, there is the *Ronde de nuit* which involves instrument and night flying.

For foreign visitors, many of them British, the *Deauville Air Rally* is run, while Robin organizes one for pilots flying aircraft of its manufacture. Some time ago we took part in one of these, a fantastic rally to West Africa and back—7,000 miles in 12 days.

France is a big country by European standards and there is much to see—the flat green plains of Brittany and western France, the elegance of Paris, the wine-producing areas and, of course, the South of France with such famous resorts as Nice, Cannes and St. Tropez.

There is something for everyone in France: good food and wine, ancient buildings, art, beautiful countryside and Dijon, a fine city that once belonged to the Kings of Burgundy and, more important to readers of *PILOT*, the home of Avions Robin which makes the finest single-engine lightplanes we have flown.

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### Belgium

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Across France to the northeast lies Belgium, a small country with a tragic history. In 1830, after many years under Spanish and Dutch rule, the Belgians gained their independence. Then followed a series of wars, usually between other nations, but since many of these were fought on Belgian soil the country became known as the "Cockpit of Europe."

Today Belgium, now divested of its African colonies, is the compact and quite prosperous host nation for such organizations as NATO and the European Common Market.

Before WW II light airplanes were built by Renard and an outfit run by a colorful character named Jean Stampe, who is now in his mid-eighties and very much alive. During WW I Stampe was personal pilot to King Albert of the Belgians, a towering and much loved monarch who flew as an air gunner on several occasions. Later Stampe and Renard amalgamated and for some years leading up to WW II the company manufactured considerable numbers of SV4 biplane trainers that were used by the Belgian and French air forces. The Stampe is a great aerobatic mount and many are around to this day.

Light aviation is on a modest scale in Belgium. It costs around \$1,350 to gain



Amsterdam is a beautiful city with traditional Dutch architecture and delightful canals.

a private license and, while only 20 or so schools offer tuition, there are about 70 flying clubs in the country. Sporting events are controlled by the Royal Aero Club of Belgium which must be one of the oldest in the world. This year it celebrates its 75th birthday.

After many years under Dutch rule it is hardly surprising that, although French is most widely used, some Belgians speak a form of Dutch known as Flemish. Visitors to Belgium, however, will find that in the cities many speak excellent English. Most of the air rallies are organized at the local club level although a few of the major events are inspired by the Royal Aero Club of Belgium.

The northern coast of Belgium abounds in resorts: Ostend (famed for its casino) Blankenberge and a smart little place called Le Zoute. Electric trams run along the Belgian coast joining these places and eventually enter Holland. The Belgians are a friendly people with an acute sense of belonging to a small team. If you like ancient cities and old Flemish paintings you must visit Brugge. Landing fees are \$2.70 at national airports and \$1.25 at other airfields.

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### The Netherlands

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Bordering Belgium is another small and valiant country, Holland, or as it is often known, The Netherlands. The Dutch, a nation with great seafaring traditions, have produced some of the finest painters of all times.

Theirs is an unusual country, for much of it has been reclaimed from the sea. Indeed, great areas of Holland lie below sea level. (For example Schiphol,

the international airport of Amsterdam, has an elevation of minus 13 feet.) Consequently the Dutch have become adept at fighting the sea, and their great sea walls, or dykes, are among the wonders of the world.

The flat, orderly countryside, punctuated by traditional Dutch windmills, has a charm of its own. There are the vast tulip fields, the picturesque canals and, since hills are unknown, pedal cycles may be seen by the tens of thousands—the Dutch are truly a nation on wheels.

Holland suffered greatly during WW II and the return to peace was followed by the loss of her overseas possessions. Nevertheless, the country made great economic strides until more recent years when the recession hit her badly. In consequence, general aviation is only just beginning to grow. This is hardly surprising as it costs some \$2,150 to gain a private pilot license (twice the cost of a British PPL).

Sporting events are controlled by the Royal Netherlands Aeronautical Assn. and various rallies are organized by member clubs. There are no mountains or even hills and the only obstructions to flight are man-made. The Dutch are hard-working and capable, their standard of living is high and the country has a charm and atmosphere that is unique. Amsterdam is a beautiful, old city with its traditional Dutch architecture and delightful canals. A lot of English is read and spoken, so British and American visitors should have it easy in Holland.

Part Two of "Flying in Europe" will examine general aviation flying in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, West Germany and Switzerland. □