



Bristol Strut Young Eagles Day - May 2nd 1998

A good time was had by all! This year, on the suggestion of Operations staff at Filton, we arranged the event to coincide with the visit Concorde would make to the airfield for one of its Bay of Biscay runs. It was thought the arrivals and departures of such a distinctive aircraft would provide an added attraction for our young visitors, some having seldom if ever seen it close up. And so it was.

As in previous years, we approached Tutors at a couple of local schools offering free flights to those students who wished to research and prepare a simple project on aviation. This technique has worked well for us in the past, as it identifies the youngsters who have a serious desire to fly, and is somewhat self-regulating with regard to the numbers that eventually come forward. Thus we are not overwhelmed with demand, and our volunteer pilots have reasonably air-minded passengers who will benefit most from the experience.

In addition to the schools, we approached the Bristol Children's Hospital through connections established via the Greenhawk Trust headed by Stephen Wood. Previously, a group of Cystic Fibrosis patients had flown with us, but this time a dozen or so youngsters from the oncology department came along to experience the joy of flight. We were aiming for a total of 30 - 35 Eagles, and to share the load and avoid un-necessary waiting around, our visitors were invited by telephone to arrive either morning or afternoon. We had offers from at least ten pilots volunteering for the day, some aeroplanes had four seats, others two, so this seemed a good balance.

After a week of uncertain weather dominated by low pressure systems, Saturday dawned bright and sunny and we gave a sigh of relief and thought all was well. However, our optimism turned out to be somewhat unfounded, as a stiff breeze continued to blow 50 degrees across the centre line of runway 09 putting some of our aircraft out of limits for safe operation. Eventually we started the flying with just six aircraft, which included a Hughes 500 helicopter! Our work was now cut out to get through the list of names on the flight log before tea time, and we now had the additional problem of avoiding Concorde's slot times. It's schedule would involve two landings and two departures throughout the day, and, by arrangement with Flight Ops, all Eagle flights were to be suspended during Speedbird movements. This turned out to be more of a limitation than we first thought. However, the morning shift ran more or less to plan, and by lunchtime all the new Eagles invited in the morning had flown and received their shiny new certificates. During the morning, though, word came through that one of our aircraft had developed a minor problem with its tailwheel, and the owner had wisely withdrawn from Eagle Operations. That left us with only four aeroplanes and a helicopter with which to complete the afternoon schedule!

The afternoon shift arrived promptly on time, and the first flights were allocated. The Concorde schedule had by this time suffered several delays, and we were waiting for it to depart for the Bay of Biscay. However, there was just time to get in the first few Eagle Flights of the afternoon, so with the blessing of Filton ATC off they went.

Most will agree Concorde is a very impressive aeroplane, but it does have a rather pronounced noise signature, especially on take off! So, to spread the noise around a bit, the Captain opted to depart first to the East and next time to the West. Although the occasion wasn't widely advertised, it seemed most of the local population had turned out to line the boundary fence and watch. They were not disappointed!

After the dust had settled our small team was given clearance to continue Eagle operations, and the local Press had arrived to take some pictures and a few interviews. Several new Eagles subsequently appeared on the front page of the Evening Post the following Tuesday, and also featured in the local Daily. All the youngsters who flew with us came back with wide grins, and memories which will last for a long time to come.

We finished the day having flown 34 Young Eagles, comprising all the invited Eagles plus a number of brothers and sisters, also a total of nine Older Eagles (mums, dads and helpers.) The Bristol Strut is indebted to all the Filton staff for making it all possible, especially Pete Metheral in ATC and Mathew Blackburn in Flight Operations. Our thanks go to them all for the use of their wonderful Airfield!

Aircraft which took part in the Bristol Young Eagle event were:

G-DADS Hughes 500 Pete Turner
G-BSVE CP301 Smaragd Ron Perry
G-BSSW PA28 Warrior John Pearce, George Brown, Graham Blower
G-BWNU PA38 Tomahawk Pete Hill
G-BLWH Fournier RF6b Brian Oke
G-ALIJ PA17 Vagabond Trevor Wilcock
G-BPTA Stinson 108-2 Ed Hicks
G-AYYT Jodel 1050 Chris Turner
G-BVAF Piper J3 Cub * Nigel Hitchman
G-BSFV Woodies Pusher * Mike Wells

* The last two were brought onto the grass area to act as static display aircraft for the day.

Ian & Mary Leader
PFA Bristol Strut
May 1998

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