

Young Eagles at Bristol - 27th April 2002



A great day out was had by all at Filton, when a total of 37 youngsters experienced the thrill of flight for the first time! However, it was not all 'plane sailing'...

Right up until the last week of preparation, it seemed there was a real possibility that our Young Eagles day wouldn't happen. The weather was, of course, the main offender, and the forecast did not promise favourable conditions at all. From the Monday before the event was due to take place, the Met Office was predicting an area of low pressure which spelled unsettled weather throughout the forthcoming weekend, and this prediction was reinforced daily as the picture became clearer. To avoid the Bank Holiday on the following weekend, we had arranged with Filton operations that an alternative 'rain day' would be scheduled for Sunday the 28th, reasoning that on average a bad weather system usually pushes through in 24 hours. *Bad plan!* A low pressure of the size we were experiencing was going to upset the whole weekend and several days thereafter as well.

So it was Friday evening before we actually decided to go for it, although the forecast of high winds was no small cause for concern. However, the long TAF did promise winds down the runway, so that gave us the hope that most aircraft would be able to fly, even if the tail-draggers might have difficulty ground handling. The clincher was that the next day, Sunday, had a forecast even more dismal than Saturday, so it was discounted as an option. Thus it was Saturday or nothing, and it was decided that we would let our passengers arrive anyway, and assess the conditions for safe flying on the day.



The response from our appeal for pilots and aeroplanes was magnificent! We had offers of help from all the local flyers who had flown Eagles before, and also offers from The Swindon Strut and the Wessex Strut who had been approached by e-mail. For several weeks during the planning we had more aeroplanes promised than Eagles registered to fly! And this was the reason for our next dilemma; where are all the youngsters?

Three local schools had been circulated details of the Young Eagle programme, and dozens of information packs had been requested. However, as the time approached for the projects to be returned we were faced with silence. To our astonishment, it seemed that the task of preparing a simple project on 'why I want to fly' was beyond all but a small handful of students, and we concluded that the real urge to aviate was simply not there within the majority of our community. In desperation, we contacted the local ATC squadron, which we knew was composed entirely

of air-minded youngsters. *Wrong again!* Out of maybe 20 or so cadets we got three projects back initially, and a couple more dribbled in later. "What on earth is going on?", we wondered.

With all this lack of activity on the Eagle front, we were now seriously considering scratching the whole event, to the extent that we were now advising pilots that their kind offer of assistance may not be needed after all. *Bad plan again!* In hindsight this action very nearly left us short of aeroplanes on the day, simply because of those that had to drop out due to wind conditions proving out-of-limits. And that wasn't the end of it, because in addition to those grounded by the wind, apologies arrived from two aircraft with tech problems on the day, and a further one which couldn't get out of his field because the resident sheep were producing lambs! A catalogue of total disaster which finished up with us short of **ten** aircraft out of the 17 which were due to come.

Eventually, more and more consent forms arrived, and by Friday evening we had a total of 31 prospective Young Eagles. With the diminished number of aircraft available, the 10 pilots pulled off a magnificent achievement to provide rides for them all along with a handful of siblings who came along too. The final count was 37 Young Eagles, and five mums and dads were also presented with 'older Eagles' certificates.



None of the above would have been possible, however, without the tremendous support given by the Strut members on the ground crew. Escorting Eagles to and from the aircraft, taking photographs and simply talking to the public about the PFA; we thank you all for your time and professionalism. Our thanks have also been extended to the Staff at Filton for their time and expertise; Tana and Emma in the control tower, Richard on the operations desk, and all the marshalls who kept the aircraft safe on the apron.

It is a mere 19 months before the anniversary of the Wright Brothers first flight, and thus the climax of the Young Eagle programme. Will we have another YE day in Bristol before then? Maybe... In spite of all the problems we encountered this year, all those happy faces made it more than worthwhile.



While all the Eagles were coming and going on their first flights, and our Strut ground crew were busy looking after their families, three photographers were following events closely recording all those happy faces as each one returned to base. **Ian Wakeling** was one of them, ably assisted by his wife **Shirley** who kept extensive notes on who was who in the pictures, and the other was **Dave Hall** who has only recently acquired his digital camera and was keen to explore it's possibilities. Also, on the cinematic front was **Pat Stride** and his video camera.

We now have all their results, which you will agree are stunning! Past YE events were somewhat lacking in photographic records, but this year has made up for them. We wanted to share them with you, so have compiled a gallery page on the Strut website where you can browse the whole set. Just click on the link below to open the thumbnails.

Click on any picture to enlarge it, and use the back-button to return. The video footage is available for Strut members to borrow from the Strut video library, and Pat has now compiled all his work from 1997 to 2002 in one handy volume.

Our grateful thanks go to Ian, Shirley, Dave and Pat for their skill and dedication to the cause; the results say it all!

The pilots who participated in YE 2002 were:

Name	Reg	Aircraft Type
Graham Blower	G - BCCY	Robin HR200/100
Simon Vowles	G - BCCY	Robin HR200/100
John Charters	G - BPPF	PA 38 Tomahawk
Andy Harryman	G - BPPF	PA 38 Tomahawk
Peter Hill	G - BWNJ	PA 38 Tomahawk
Geoff Roe	G - DENS	CP301 Smaragd
Dudley Pattison	G - DUDZ	Robin 400
Pete Turner	G - DADS	Hughes 500
Chris Watts	G - BRBD	Piper PA 28
Chris Fryer	G - BRBD	Piper PA 28

Thanks to all for their generous contribution of time and considerable expense which made it all possible for 37 new Eagles to realise their dreams!

Ian & Mary Leader