



INVICTA AERO CLUB



# WINTER NEWS LETTER

WINTER 2025/2026

## Building the Future: News and Updates from the CAA

In October 2025, the CAA began their journey to simplify aviation licensing, with major changes such as the discontinuation of the LAPL and the transition to NPPL.

This has now opened the pathway for those wishing to begin with NPPL(M) and continue training all the way through to PPL(A) via NPPL(A).

### What this meant for the students at Invicta Aero Club

As we set off on the journey of 2025 at Invicta Aero Club, many new members joined to start training towards their LAPL.

This change by the CAA midway through 2025 meant that members choosing the LAPL route would then be applying for a NPPL(A) rather than the LAPL, creating a much simpler pathway to PPL(A). At the time of writing this, we have our first student booked for their PPL skills test after completing their NPPL(A) last month. Good luck to all current and future students choosing this path, I really do believe this opens up General Aviation even more than before!

## A message from the Director:

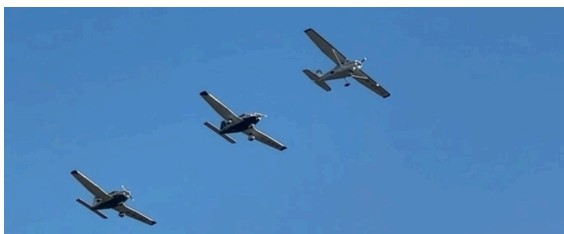
Clive Bennewith

What a fantastic year 2025 has been for us here at Invicta Aero Club. We've seen two new bases, two new aircraft join the fleet and lots of new pilots joining our Community here in Kent.

With the changes in licensing after the 1st October, we have taken the opportunity to expand our cost efficient flying and opened a microlight school at Stoke with a fantastic Eurostar.

At the other side of the Aero Club we are awaiting final approval from the CAA for our ATO to conduct Instrument courses and Flight Instructor courses from Lydd. Along with our partnership at Bristol Ground School, we can offer ATPL exams and look forward to more exciting expansions in 2026.

Have a great festive period with your families and happy, safe landings in 2026.



## Invicta Horses – Air display team

August 2025 saw our first mini Airshow at Stoke's summer festival. The YAK52, Pitts S2B, Baby Mustang T51, Cub and Storch all flew their routines, and our pair of PA28 Archers with the Rocket made their debut as 'Invicta Horses'.

This exciting angle of the Invicta Aero Club will develop further in 2026, so keep your eyes peeled and ears to the ground for any upcoming opportunities and appearances.

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# The Introduction of Lydd and Stoke Medway

Following on from the success down at Lydd through winter 2024/2025, we decided to permanently base G-KAIR and open our Lydd Office in Spring 2025.

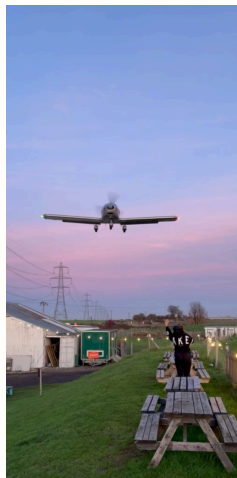
Our wonderfully kitted out PA28 Archer has drawn in somewhat of a crowd down at Lydd, with many new members and students joining to complete NPPL(A) licences right through to the IMC and night ratings.

In more recent weeks, Lydd has seen the addition of three more aircraft which have all been busy completing night ratings, hobby flying and NPPL training in the mighty G-FLIP who completed 50 hours between November and December.

We are also very excited to see the Eurostar starting to move, and some of our members starting to look towards the microlight grass roots from our now, third base at Stoke Medway. We're very excited to see what this brings in 2026 for the club.

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## PPL Training 2025

I started my lessons at Lydd in June 2023 with Gary Merchant and did my first solo there that November. I don't think I'll ever forget the brief moment of panic I experienced when I was late downwind, and it dawned on me that whatever happened I would be landing the plane. I did all of my lessons with Gary and, as anyone that's flown with him knows already, you're never far away from a steep turn or a wing over when you fly with him.

I joined Invicta at the beginning of this year so that I could carry on flying with Gary and having done all of my training at Lydd, my first flight into Rochester was quite an experience. When I turned onto final for O2, I wondered whether we were lined up with the runway or a small field and I'll never forget as we flew over the go kart track Gary saying "you need to be lower and slower" and me replying "I don't really want to".

One of the lowest points was just after joining the club, I forgot how to land the plane, flaring too early, not flaring, I think I did every type of 'arrival' imaginable. So it was back into the circuit to get to an acceptable standard before I was let loose again.

I flew my skills test at the beginning of June with Rod almost exactly 2 years to the day from when I started. It turned out to be one of the hottest days of the year and after 2 hours of flying you could've poured me out of the aircraft.

I've been asked if I've got any advice to give people that are currently doing their PPL, so here goes... Working in air traffic gave me a big advantage when it came to using the radio (although I still regularly put my call sign at the beginning of a radio call and more than once have given myself a basic service) so I'd say go and immerse yourself in the aviation environment.



Go flying with people, visit towers, watch videos, anything that familiarises you with the sights and sounds of flying. The less you have to think about the admin, the more you can concentrate on the fun stuff.

The other piece of advice that I'd give is to get the exams done early. I left some of the harder ones until the end and it meant that I spent a lot of time revising in the run up to my skills test.

Having got my licence, I hope the novelty of just 'popping down' to the Isle of Wight never wears off, or the satisfaction you get when you see the reaction of a friend who has never been flying before.

– Chris – PPL achieved 2025



## MARTIN YALE 2025

In the early days of flight, most aircraft were taildraggers. Then, as paved runways became more common, and with a desire for boring things, such as directional stability, someone decided to take the little wheel from the tail, make it bigger and bolt it to the nose. But I wanted to have a go at this tailwheel witchcraft, albeit I was apprehensive. What if I ground loop? What if I hit the brakes and dig a furrow with the spinner? During my first briefing, my instructor chirpily said: "There are two kinds of tailwheel pilots. Those who have ground looped and those who will ground loop...I've done it!" Little did I know that, by the end of my first day, I would fall into the first category.

The first briefing largely boiled down to "wind, wind, wind, torque, propwash". Direction? Speed? Crosswind correction? What will it do when I open the throttle? We walked out to the Citabria. I strapped myself into the front. My instructor folded himself into the back. Fumbling underneath the seat to move the seat (but just waving my hand around in mid-air), I asked: "Can I adjust the seat?" I asked. "No!" came the reply. We ran through the checklist. Brakes on. "Clear prop!" My heart sank. I called back to my instructor, more in hope than expectation: "Do you have the keys?" "...There are no keys!" came the reply. With a press of the small, silver starter button, the engine burst into life.

There are two ways to steer the Citabria on the ground, differential braking and the rudder pedals, which, unlike in the other aircraft I had flown, were entirely separate from the brakes. Tentatively, I applied more throttle, holding full up elevator and aileron into wind. We started to roll... straight towards the scenery. We were on a hard surface, so I applied a little opposite brake. We stopped rolling towards the scenery on that side... and then rolled straight towards the scenery on the other side. If Kelvin had a breathalyser...

Finally, I held a straight(ish) line, rolling in the direction(ish) of the holding point. On the grass, I switched to the rudder pedals and continued in the right direction(ish). "Got the hang of this!" I thought, as I lined up on the runway. We started the take-off roll, aileron still into wind, I tracked relatively straight. Voice from the back: "Stick forward!" The tail was off the ground. "More, more". I pushed forward expecting to see tufts of grass flying off the propeller tips: "Hold it there!" We built speed and the Citabria became light. "It'll take off when it's ready" came the voice from the back. Slight backward pressure on the stick and we were airborne.

I climbed out with the turn and slip co-ordinator perfectly centred, despite a quite significant crosswind. As I turned into the overhead, clearly banking, I noticed that the turn and slip was still showing flat and level, perfectly co-ordinated. "The turn and slip isn't working", I said. "Oh, you have to turn it on!" came a voice from the back. One for the checklist Clive... (we checked later – it wasn't there). Having welcomed turn and slip to the disco, I was not quite as precise as I thought! We did some general handling, the usual stalls and PFLs, etc. Sitting on the centreline of a high wing aircraft provided great visibility all round. No Garmin, no GPS, no autopilot. Stick, rudder, raw flying. This is flying!

Time to land. In a trike, I had never really taken much notice of the wind. Point it at the runway and do whatever it takes to keep it travelling in that direction, on a day like this, often coming down the approach looking out of the side window. Now it was being drilled into me (a) that what the wind is doing is a top priority and (b) dip the wing into wind, don't sideslip. This was an entirely new technique for me, but I picked it up relatively quickly. We came down a steady glidepath towards O2 flared for a three-point landing. Touchdown, on the centre line(ish). That, in a trike, is the time a pilot normally begins to relax. But I could feel the rudder pedals thumping into the bottom of my feet as my instructor performed some sort of Irish jig on the pedals.





As we slowed, I applied right rudder and trundled towards the taxiway. Again, I thought I had the hang of it. At the taxiway and, with an excess of exuberance, I applied right rudder, completely forgetting that the tail was one almighty pendulum and, without airspeed, there was nothing to mitigate its effects. As I lined up with the taxiway, I released the rudder. We kept turning. I applied left rudder, more and more until the pedal was on the floor. We kept turning. Facing towards the long grass, I realised I was a tailwheel pilot who had ground looped. But I had a silly grin on my face. This tailwheel lark was fun, really fun!

I was introduced to short field technique, Safetycom, and practiced PFLs and glide approaches. The Citabria has no flaps, so lots of side-slipping practice. We went to Southend for wheeler and hard runway practice. It was busy. Many aircraft were stopping there on the way back from an airshow. ATC: "Invicta O7, number two to the Typhoon!". At least the Eurofighter wasn't behind us!!! According to the Southend Echo, the Citabria, is now on the RAF fleet, having snapped us, along with the Eurofighter and two Hurricanes, with the headline: "Fresh photos show RAF aircraft landing at Southend Airport!". As I amassed more landings, I began to realise that, in the rollout, the rudder pedals were not banging into the bottom of my feet any more... I was, in fact, Michael Flatley!

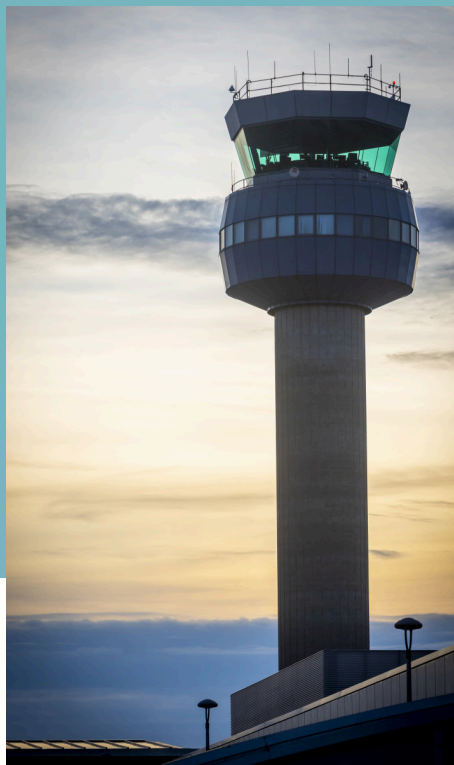
Then, one Sunday afternoon, it was solo time. No-one else to save me if I threw it at the weeds. Whenever I have done a first solo, I have always felt strangely relaxed. A wave of calm came over me. Aileron into wind, open the throttle, release the back pressure nose forward, nose forward, nose forward, getting lighter, ease back on the stick... and away... round the circuit, back down the approach, dipping the wing into wind, flare for a three pointer, dance on the pedals, slow to taxi pace, back to the apron (without any pirouettes!).

I had done it and it gave me a huge sense of achievement. I had learnt to do something that many pilots never do. I could fly a tailwheel. And it was enormous fun. Basic, raw flying. Just stick and rudder. As I pulled up on the apron, I saw one of those boring aircraft with the big wheel bolted to the front, one that completely behaves itself on the ground, reflected on the fantastic experience I'd had learning to fly tailwheel, and thought: "Who put THAT there?!"

## A message from ATC

When it comes to MAYDAY and PAN calls, they can be quite intimidating. Who wants to be the one on frequency that makes a fuss on the radio for something that may or may not be a problem? The answer is, who cares. It can't be overstated that it's better to overreact in that situation than keep quiet. If you're not able to get a call out in the proper format or if you're not sure what the problem is, just let us know in plain language what you think the issue is and what your intentions are and we can go from there.

ATC is here to help, but we can only do that if we know what's going on, once you have aviated and navigated it's time (if possible) to communicate. A great example of why communication is so important was an emergency I experienced where a light aircraft had made a normal join via the overhead, I asked them to orbit left due to traffic on the ILS, at which point they told me they'd like to get on the ground ASAP because they had a low voltage warning light that had been on for a while. Had we been given the information earlier we would have expedited the join, got the ILS traffic out of the way and got them on the ground much quicker. It's definitely not a criticism, just a good learning point, the more information we have the better equipped we are to deal with the problem.





# New Members 2025

The year of 2025 saw a sudden large increase in our member base. With the addition of a second base at Lydd, the new arrival of our second PA28 Archer G-BJAG as well as our new resident G-EDTO the Cessna 172 Rocket, it was time to remove the 'chocks' and welcome those from around Kent to come and join the fun.

2025 saw a 100% member base increase, reaching over 100 members in early December and still climbing. Our student base has drastically increased in line with offering what we believe to be the most competitive rates for the most well equipped aircraft in the South East.

## Upside down, or downside up?

While coming to the end of my hour building/halfway through my ATPLs and making it my aim to visit a new destination on every flight, I found myself coming to a place in my aviation journey I never thought possible – mundane and slightly bored – I was warned about this before obtaining my PPL, naively I thought 'never!'.

Throughout my journey I had heard Clive's name through the community at Rochester mentioned a few times but never could put a face to a name. So, I decided to upgrade the pilot (me) and give Clive a call to enquire about completing my aero rating at the tail end of 2024. By summer 2025 I had it in the bag but it wasn't, as they say, 'plane sailing'!

New club, new planes and new way of doing things – I was stuck in the stone age coming from other clubs where paper is still in the cockpit. Invicta's modern, common sense approach makes it seamless from an operational and piloting stand point. Knowing how much fuel is in the plane before you get there without having to give anyone a call its effortless and a huge time saver.

First sortie. The briefing genuinely made me feel like I was in Top Gun. The hangar environment added to the overall feel of going to do aerobatics and I was reliably informed that I wouldn't be doing much flying but moreover building G tolerance and subsequently discovered I had none! I also discovered I had acquired the skill of filling up paper bags! Nevertheless, it was still enjoyable, and you learn more about your limits than any PPL standard will teach you.

You soon learn if you fly the plane and look where you're told to, your G tolerance increases exponentially. I found myself really falling in love with aeros, a bit like any relationship it takes some hard work but in the end its worth it!

After lots of armchair flying and going through drills and linking manoeuvres had me through the course within 6.5 hours and I can honestly say – why did I not get this rating sooner!

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After receiving the updated licence now including the new rating, there was one final piece to put the icing on the cake. That was to do a check flight in my very own air tourer. I have now taken countless people on the so-called "ride of their lives" and its refreshing to see that I wasn't alone in my talent of bag filling!

Like anything in life, it takes persistence and I had the usual thoughts of "is this for me?" and as I've already said it ABSOLUTELY is for me, and I'm already looking forward to my more advanced aero-rating and possibly joining Invicta Horses in the future so watch this space.

My advice to any pilot suffering from encroaching mundanity is do this rating. If you don't use the rating its valid for life so never a waste of time or money, its an investment in your skill set which will make you a better and safer and more aware pilot and one thing we all have in common as pilots is we all want to do better.

– Sam Slocomb, Aeros 2025

# Formation Training 2025

As 2025 comes to a close, we are excited to reflect on a remarkable year, and it wouldn't be fair if the introduction of our new formation training programme didn't get an honourable mention. Launched earlier this year, this initiative has quickly gained popularity among our members and has been a resounding success. Those who are available enrol, those who aren't, ask when the next course is!

The formation training courses were designed to enhance pilots' skills in flying in close formation, an essential aspect of various aerial operations and an introduction to the idea of displays. From the outset, the programme attracted an enthusiastic group of participants eager to expand their flying capabilities. The positive feedback we've received indicates that our members found the training not only beneficial but also enjoyable, fostering camaraderie among fellow aviators.

A special thanks must be extended to our dedicated instructors as well as the commitment of our students. We've seen remarkable progress in the skills and confidence of those who participated. The community spirit at Invicta Aero Club truly shone through as pilots worked together, sharing knowledge and experience.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to announce that we plan to offer additional courses in formation training in 2026, potentially opening them to non-members in the near future. This initiative aligns with our commitment to promoting these specialist aviation skills and fostering a broader community of flying enthusiasts.

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## MEET THE TEAM

Meet the management of the Invicta Aero Club team



**Clive Bennewith**  
Director  
Instructor, SEP,  
Tailwheel,  
Complex & Aeros.



**Gary Merchant**  
Head of training  
FE, SEP, Night,  
Tailwheel, Aeros, IR,  
Complex



**Ben McAlonen**  
Safety Officer  
PPL, Aeros,  
Tailwheel and  
Pitts Pilot.



**Alex Church**  
Operations and  
Pilot

# ELBA ISLAND - THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

INVICTA AERO CLUB



## PHILLIP LANGHAM

Our adventure began early as we loaded up three planes: the Cherokee Six, the Arrow and Ian's 172. Aaron made sure to bring the most crucial item, Krispy Kreme doughnuts. We took off first for a short hop across the Channel to Le Touquet for Border Control. After a quick stop, we continued down the coast towards Limoges, where we expected a simple refuel and meal. Instead, we faced a challenge when going landside to eat, realising we couldn't return airspace without a special code. With Tim's help as our resident French speaker, we eventually resolved the issue and took off again.

Flying the Cherokee Six, with Clive in the front and Andy and Finley in the back, we enjoyed stunning views as we headed to Avignon, spotting the iconic bridge from 'Mr. Bean's Holiday'. As we crossed the French coast, I remember hearing the distinctive beeps from the autopilot disconnect as Andy disconnected the autopilot and we made a quick overtake of Ian's Cessna and then prepared for the long sea crossing overflying Corsica and then descending down into Elba. Elba certainly had one of the coolest approaches, that only some of us chose to follow or some chose to make a more direct approach. After safely landing and securing the planes, we celebrated with a meal and a few well-earned beers.

On Day 2, we planned our route to Annecy and prepared the planes after passing security. I flew the Arrow with Clive and Aaron, enjoying a scenic departure over Elba as we headed up the Italian coast towards Pisa. We perfectly timed flying in formation over the Leaning Tower of Pisa, then continued our journey along the stunning coastline to Albenga Riviera Airport for a refuel before heading toward the Alps. After switching to Ian's Cessna with Finley, we slowly climbed to 10,000 feet, dodging restricted airspace and enjoying breathtaking views of the Alps.



To cross the FIR boundary we had to follow a set route with a narrow crossing between valleys, as to cross at a certain waypoint. Once we had crossed this point the Cherokee Six went off in search of Courchevel but we continued along the valley just admiring where we were. A real highlight was flying past Val Thorens and spotting ski lifts that were higher than we were! Soon we started our descent which brought us directly over the crystal blue Lake Annecy that guided us into the airport.

After landing and refuelling, we found a hotel called Les Tresoms, which had a perfect view over the lake. We rewarded ourselves with a couple of pints overlooking the water, some even braving a dip in the lake. That evening started with a fun walk through a small forest, down a very steep hill and then along the edge of the lake. Apart from Tim, who hired an electric bike to zip down to the town with. We then met Tim there and explored the Old Town, which was beautiful.





## ELBA ISLAND - THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME - CONTINUED

## INVICTA AERO CLUB



Having heard from previous trips about the legendary fondue, we made it our meal of choice and set off in search of some fondue and ended up in the same restaurant that the previous trip went too. After dinner we headed out for a few more pints, then a fun walk back to the hotel, back up that hill, but now in the dark. I think we all agreed that that was a truly memorable day.

Our third day began slowly, but with thunderstorms looming, we headed to the airport. In the back of the Arrow with Tim and Adam, we enjoyed views of the Alps while navigating weather challenges. Reaching Troyes for lunch, we sampled the local dish Andouillette, with most opting for fries instead. I switched to Ian's Cessna again as we navigated around Paris' airspace until finally spotting Le Touquet. After a quick border check, we took off for the last leg back to Rochester.



## CHRISTMAS PARTY 2026

With the introduction of many new members this year, our event was even bigger and better than before, seating around 100 people for Christmas dinner!

In addition to the dinner, we introduced a new awards ceremony to celebrate significant achievements, including PPLs and first solos. This year, the 'Hub of the Club Award' was presented to Jim Stevens, and the 'More Right Rudder Trophy' went to Andy Hogan. As the club grows, it's wonderful to recognise those who help bring it all together!

We also held the KSS Air Ambulance charity auction, which raised around £6,000 for the charity, featuring some fantastic prizes. The evening was a great success!



## NEW RATINGS COMING IN 2026

Coming in 2026, we have some exciting developments. With the application for the ATO being submitted late 2025, we expect to be up and running with the ability to start offering FI courses and the CBIR in early 2026.

This means that with Invicta Aero Club, you could now be looking to train from zero, right through to full IR and or Flight Instructor!

If you're interested in training for your CBIR and or FI rating, please get in touch!

