

Jersey International Air Rally - 27th to 29th June 2008

Contributed by Webmaster

As much as the month of June should be synonymous with fine summer weather, so is the Jersey International Air Rally known for the ingenuity of its competitors in finding novel ways of getting to the Island from all over Europe despite low cloud, fog, and assorted other problems. This year, the fact that the Rally had been put back from its normal place on the calendar, May, to June made no difference! After at least two weeks of good weather, Friday 27th June saw Jersey's first low cloud and poor visibility for some time.

At the early morning met briefing attended by air rally organiser, Eveline Hawkin, and club chairman, Jonathan Gready, the forecast was for an improving situation during the day and with this news, it was decided to go ahead with the rally accepting that some competitors would experience problems. The competition team was prepared to re-allocate later times to those affected, allowing all crews an equal chance to take part in the various parts of the flying programme.

The first task was a timed arrival overhead Flers airfield in the depths of Normandy. Here Jersey club members were ready to mark aircraft as they aimed for their arrival time overhead the runway. From this point, five minutes were allowed to complete a full circuit of the airfield before flying along the runway, and completing a second circuit for a precision landing. Such was the accuracy of some competitors that fractions of a second would decide the top places.

From Flers the crews followed a "treasure hunt" route looking for various clues. The final clue, a Jersey flag on the coast north of Granville proved difficult and only six competitors managed to spot this last point before setting out to La Rocque, on Jersey's south east coast. This sector was also timed.

In all more than thirty aircraft successfully made it to Jersey by the end of the day. Two other crews came by boat or commercial flight. But the prize for determination should surely go to the pilots from Waterford, Ireland. They had been plagued by technical problems during the week, and solved these issues only to find that the refuelling truck had broken down, and then of course the weather was bad! Using just one aircraft they made two flights on the Friday in order to get everyone to the Island, the second flight landing at 9 pm!

Crews enjoyed a warm welcome from the Jersey club members, joining together for the Friday evening dinner at the Pomme d'Or hotel. Saturday morning saw a blanket of fog over the Island but this was of little concern to the competitors, as the day consisted of nothing more demanding than a very enjoyable car treasure hunt, a pig spit roast at the aero club, and finally, the gala dinner attended by the Island's Lieutenant Governor, His Excellency Lieutenant General Andrew Ridgway and Mrs Ridgway.

Prize winners were announced by competitions manager, the aero club's chief flying instructor, James Evans, and presented by His Excellency. The Grand Prix, the Bror-Eric Hjulstad Trophy, was won by UK competitor Rodney Blois flying a Cessna 172 with Paul Smiddy runner-up.

As part of this year's event, nearly £1700 was raised through prize envelopes and an auction by Tommy A'Court of Maillards for the club's charity project "Helping Hands". The aim of this project is to give a day of entertainment including a flight around the Island to local special needs children.

Most crews left the island in fine conditions on the Sunday, many joining Jersey pilots for a reception by the Deauville aero club followed by lunch at the airport's restaurant. But wherever the destination there was a renewed determination to "see you next year".