

# Falco Builders Letter



*PFA Rally Sywell 1972*

## Falcoholic or What?

by Neville Langrick

The *Falco Builders Letter* of December 2020 covered so many interesting points which spurred my memory of my involvement in the Falco, the first being the tribute to Mike Jerram in *Pilot* magazine. It must have been an issue in 1982 when I spotted the first advert for the Sequoia Falco and invested in the detailed drawings, the point of no return.

My introduction to the Falco world was at Crosland Moor Airfield (built by David Brown of world-wide tractor fame and later owner of Aston Martin), where I was flying in the 70's and shared a hangar with Ted Dawson who owned G-AVUJ, a beautiful Falco F.8L Laverda Series 4. Ted was a very sociable character and insisted on introducing me to the delights of his aircraft, and I swore that if I could ever afford it this would be my aeroplane of choice. Little did I know at the time that it would be written off in a hangar fire at Doncaster in 1979, but as we know old Falcos never die

and some of the undamaged hardware and the engine were included in other Falco projects.

We even had the UK Falco agent only 15 miles away in Bradford, and I suspect this was where UJ originated. The sales card shows the Aeromere series 3 but Laverda produced a further 20 with the 160 engine and CS prop.

I started the project with a friend, Bill Natrass who had similar desires to build an aeroplane and had recently retired as a shop floor foreman engineer at David Brown Tractors in Huddersfield, spending five years as an airframe fitter in the RAF

during WW 2, mainly in India. He had a 6'x4' garden shed with a 4" Myford lathe with which he worked wonders.

During the final months of construction Bill had a heart attack and stroke which left him speechless for a while. By this stage in the project we had divided our jobs. I was panel and electrical wiring and Bill the rest. He always carried a small box of bits around and when visiting him in hospital spent most of the time trying to establish where they went. He partially recovered

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*At Sherburn-in-Elmet 1968*



and managed a couple of trips in the finished a/c but unfortunately he died shortly afterwards. His skills were sorely missed, but I was assisted by Les Scattergood and Bob Hall of Sherburn Engineering in the final months, and Les also took over the role of PFA (Popular Flying Association) Inspector as Brian Fox had also met an untimely end in a boating accident. A young apprentice working there at the time, Ian Hussey is now our LAA Inspector (Light Aircraft Association).

My skills originated from having done woodwork at school, the only subject I found easy and enjoyed despite career masters warning me it would never be of any use! The materials and tools are the same in aircraft woodwork and the joints are easier. We produced as much as possible in our homes and when assembly started, we built a sectional timber "hangar" in the Sherburn EGCJ 1968 garden which was extended to a 'T' for final assembly. We continued working individually but met one evening and the weekend until completion. Bill taught me patience and that with consistent and regular effort things were completed and would stick to this routine even when I was away on family holidays.

We used the spruce kits which were then available from Doncaster Sailplanes, who were the European agents, cut to section and hardware we couldn't make from Sequoia who would at the time supply part kits e.g., Bill made a pattern for the U/C gearbox which we had cast and x-rayed and Sequoia supplied the gears. We were on a tight budget and had decided to go for the Rosenhan wheels and brakes, and I had bought a basket-case Lycoming O-320-A3C which was a 150 carburetted engine on a conical mount plus a couple of used maingear struts. Tom Maloney, now of Transair arranged for it to go to Canada for overhaul and eventually delivered it personally. It was based at Sherburn for eight years and moved to Brighton in 1996. It was about this time that I met Alastair Newall who was a commercial pilot and enthusiastic Brighton resident who showed me the ropes on my first cross-channel flight to Ostend and Calais. Shortly afterwards he introduced me to basic aerobatics in the Falco.

G-BYLL was completed in 1988 after five and a half years. It was the 16th Sequoia Falco to fly and won the PFA Air Squadron Trophy at Cranfield in 1989 (on the

way home from the Malta Air Rally) and 10 years later the Halton Trophy. I owned the aircraft for 28 years during which it logged about 770 hours including touring Europe extensively with my long-suffering wife Shirley who was very much a crew member, changing radio frequencies and

The *Falco Builders Letter* is published roughly four times a year by Falco Aircraft Association, LLC. Duane Root, President. duaneroot@netzero.net David Leslie, Treasurer, david.s.leslie@gmail.com. George Richmond, Newsletter editor. ctp.george@gmail.com Alfred Scott, Ignoramus Emeritus. (804) 353-1713 or (804) 690-4591 Publication dates are the 10th of March, June, September and December.

Articles, news items and tips are welcome and should be submitted at least 10 days prior to publication date.

The *Falco Builders Letter* is available at [www.seqair.com](http://www.seqair.com) and by email—please supply your email address.





squawk codes, carefully monitoring fuel levels and watching the gear switch like a hawk on landing. The most memorable trips were: twice to ILA Berlin Schonefeld Aerospace Trade Show who paid for our fuel from the UK provided that we put the

A/C on ground display — no problem! a WW2-themed trip to Warsaw via Ruga and Peenemunde in N Germany returning via Krakow to visit the Salt Mines and Auschwitz, finally Colditz Castle and Tempelhof just before it closed and routing

home via the Air Lift route.

Casablanca was the next long trip with the aim of having a drink in Rick's Bar listening to "as time goes by." Unfortunately we didn't make it due to weather





### *Diest 2018*

and not too disappointed on discovery that whilst there are a number of bars, the film was shot entirely in Hollywood! We also didn't want to miss our slot from Tangiers to Gibraltar during the time when the Spanish were refusing entry of UK traffic to Gib from their airspace directly, so the big boys had to route Portugal and we Tangiers. One of our trio was a Chipmunk which was royally welcomed by the very small RAF contingent who's CO looked after us during our stay including a trip up the Rock to parts usually prohibited. Our friend Stuart Gane made up the trio in his Falco G-GANE. On the way home we routed central Spain, now understanding why the Spaghetti Westerns were made there, crossing the western Pyrenees to Vitoria, San Sebastian and Biarritz for a couple of days R and R at Stuart's beautiful home in Agen.

Having retired in 2003, I was looking for a refurbishment project rather than a new build. I looked at two original Falcos one in Germany, the other in Eire plus a part finished kit located at Dunkeswell which I believe was started by Alan Powell and eventually finished by George Brothwood at Speke, Liverpool. I identified a piece of metal cowl in the original silver/maroon colour scheme and understand this

had been bought from Barry Mowforth who had abandoned his project at Spaldington, East Yorks but had also acquired the engine from the salvage of G-AVUJ which as previously mentioned had been written off in a hangar fire at Doncaster airport. Alastair was by now showing more than a fleeting interest in a new build and had borrowed my plans and started a few ribs, we quickly decided to build one together. We had decided to do our own wood work rather than kit parts but were no longer able to obtain spruce cut to section as Doncaster Sailplanes had closed. Accompanied by a timber specialist, John Thompson, we selected 2 x 38ft x 4ins baulks originally stocked for boat masts and had them halved for transport.

John converted them in his Brighton workshop. This would have been sufficient for the whole project except for a couple of spoilt aileron spars. We used two-part Aerodux Resorcinol (now Dynea) glue and a 25kg tub of glue and hardener was sufficient to finish the job. We worked independently in our own garages until it was necessary to take a workshop at the airfield for assembly. All hardware was from Sequoia. Alastair flew the test flight on 15th August 2011, making it the 95th to fly. The propeller was an MT three blade and the engine an IO-

320-B1A built by Jody Arch of Norvic Aero Engines. The colour scheme is the classic Aeromere maroon and silver painted in Les Clark's finishing shop and he now has a share in the A/C. Both projects took the same time to build, we had hoped the second would be quicker! A tribute also to our patient LAA Inspector Chris Turner. I had kept BYLL as a reference and to fly throughout the project, now was the time to sell, a very frustrating and unsuccessful process but it was looking a bit tired and I decided to refurbish it. A new red paint scheme by Les, new leather interior and an overhauled O-320-A3B, took about seven and a half months and was finished in August 2013. We were able to fly both aircraft together for a period and the new 160 engine brought the cruise speed up to that of CYLL. We retained the standard Hartzell Prop. The only discernible difference was the MT's slightly quicker rate of climb. It then sold quite quickly to Flip Philips and Fred Schouton based at Hilversum airfield in the Netherlands after my last flight 16/4/2014. I keep in contact with Flip who informed me April 2021 that a fire had demolished the hangar at Hilversum and several aircraft had been lost but PH-FCO had been saved, escaping with smoke damage which was soon cleaned off. I saw Fred at Diest in 2018 but unfortunately he has since died.



### *Brighton 2012*

CYLL hasn't travelled as extensively as BYLL, but I managed trips to Libourne near Bordeaux and the favourite Old Timers Fly in at Diest, Belgium where we met up with BYLL in the Dutch registration PH-FCO and one to Stadlohn in Germany. Alastair had an epic flight to Tavira in Portugal over two days, accompanied by Les. He is also an experienced aerobatic pilot, and it's a joy to watch a graceful performance over the airfield.

Shortly after this we had a nose wheel collapse at our home airfield, fortunately

on grass resulting in only minor damage to the fuselage but the usual demolished prop which splintered spectacularly and the usual engine shock load required. This grounded the a/c for eight months in 2017, but we dealt with the repair at Brighton under the watchful eye of Ian Ross the LAA Inspector there and with fantastic help from Craig and Martha Gunder who supplied nose gear parts expeditiously. Their new u/c gearbox also looks stunning, and I thought of buying one as a work of art. We decided to replace the prop with a standard Hartzell

as we had experienced two leading edge replacements on the MT and found the Hartzell more rugged and suited some of the rougher airfields in the UK better. On inspection we found that the head of the nose gear adjustment screw had been bent slightly forward, possibly from a taxiing bump which meant that the over centre lock was not fully in place due to the down switch on the screw jack activating prematurely. On re-assembly we put a second switch in the original position between part nos 619A & 618A. Both have to be made for a green light.



There are four of us flying CYLL now, Brian joined four years ago, so it still flies regularly. I must thank Alfred for making this possible by redrafting the plans in English and making all the kit parts available. In the early days I communicated with him in laborious long hand which must have driven him scatty, but he never showed it in patient typed replies, by airmail of course. I only recall us having a couple of disagreements one being the value of "Fine Virginia Air" when a tea chest sized package arrived only half full and second trying to convince him that there was no overrun on the 12-volt U/C motor to push the nose gear spring into compression, later sorted out with the repositioning of the switch on the screw jack.

The Falcos have given me 40 years of pleasure and achievement both building and flying in the UK and overseas. It has introduced me to a wide variety of lifelong friends, I remember Brian Nelson from South Africa ringing one day to say he was in the UK and could he pop round for a look and more recently Dave and Sian Thomas at Fenland with G-CCOR and learning that parts of UJ were also used in their project. Similarly, a Falco gathering in the early 80's at Andrew Brinkley's airfield at Meppershall which Alfred attended and more recently meeting him at Manchester Airport for an evening.

I've logged about a thousand hours Falco time and visited about 70 airfields in the UK and 50 in Europe. It's diffi-

cult to establish what current interest there is in Falcos under construction or new starts. I managed to get a little information from the LAA and in the UK there are 14 projects registered but only four of them to current members. The CAA register shows five factory-built aircraft and 10 Sequoia. I had the privilege to meet most of the original builders in the UK but have lost touch as the aircrafts changed hands. Angus Buchanan must have been the last UK completed Falco which was no.101. Perhaps Alfred and Craig have a better idea of world-wide figures for ongoing projects. The temptation must be with quick build kits but so far there is nothing to match our dream machine, which I hope to fly for a few more years.





Andrea Tremolada



## Martha's Corner

Greetings from the Gundersons. Fall is here but we are still remembering the great time we had in July at Oshkosh 2023. The Falco Dinner at the Fox River Brewery was well attended with approximately 37 folks; some familiar and some new faces. Shout out to Mike Schuler for organizing the event! Time was spent at the Homebuilt Pavilion area with the Nasons, the Roots, the Shankles, and Craig Bransfield who we had the pleasure of meeting for the first time. Excitement was generated over a Nebraska Fly-In in October, hosted by George Richmond.

Regarding parts and kit sales, over the years some items in our inventory are no longer available. They either cannot be made by Craig or are now unrealistically too exorbitant to have manufactured. Anyone who has surplus or spare parts please let us know, and we may be able to match them with someone who needs them. Along these same lines, we will be adding a 2% service charge to orders with credit card or PayPal payments to lighten the fee load on anything ordered after 12/1/23. Checks and bank transfers are accepted with no additional fees.

Happy safe flying and building to all. We often hear from fellows who are in the process of building or repairing who we have never heard from before so that is a positive for the future of the Falco world. Blessings to all.—Martha



*Peter Barrett, Nancy Aitken and George Barrett*



*Above: Al Aitken with restored VW. He was its original owner and recently bought it back. Beautiful restoration.*



## Farewell to a Unique Gentleman

by Al Aitken

He was 73 years old the day I test flew his newly completed Falco. He had taken almost seven years to build it, and I had the opportunity to see his progress periodically for about half of those years. Nancy and I had met George and Joy Barrett at one of Alfred's famed annual "Oyster Fly-ins" at Rosegill in Urbana, Virginia. George was in his late 60's then, but I found him to be highly energetic and acutely intelligent and perceptive. He had an excitement about him due to building his Falco, which by then he had already worked on for several years. His wife Joy was a sweetheart, and as I looked into her eyes I saw a youthful exuberance, a thrill at the thought of her husband building his own airplane. The four of us became friends very quickly.

Joy was then suffering with Parkinson's disease, and as George progressed steadily on his Falco, Joy sadly declined steadily. I test flew his Falco on September 20, 1995, flew it a time or two more to check everything out, and then climbed back in with George at the controls to help familiarize him with his new, high-performance airplane. The day



*Joy Barrett*

I flew his Falco for its first time, I conducted a careful and thorough preflight, and George followed right behind me with every move I made. At one point, I was standing on the left wing looking at something that concerned me in the baggage area behind the two seats. George climbed briskly onto the wing beside me to have a look. I needed a wrench to remove a small panel on the interior to get a better look. George, at 73

years old, jumped down from the wing and quickly moved a few feet to his tool cart where he had every tool he thought I might need. Every tool was lined up in meticulous order by size... wrenches, screwdrivers, and others.

George continued to fly his Falco regularly, and often with Joy until her condition made that impractical. We lost Joy in 2001. George pressed on, flying his Falco often, and Nancy and I visited him from time to time. George and I once tried to fly his Falco to Oshkosh, WI, but the weather prevented us from getting there. In a subsequent year, George and one of his sons, David, were able to fly it to Oshkosh to "show it off" at aviation's largest and most famous annual EAA event. Eventually, George gave his Falco to David, who flies and maintains it to this day.

Over the years my respect for this unique gentleman grew. A retired Army Colonel and WWII combat veteran, George maintained his health, stamina, and energy well into his 90's. Nancy and I continued to visit occasionally, but then one day recently I received a call from his son, Peter. We lost George Barrett on December 28, 2022... he's now reunited with Joy... he was 101 years old.



*George Barrett*



Top: Jeff Miller's Falco. Above: Craig Bransfield's

## Mailbox

I have now completed a complete overhaul of the 320 engine and have a GT prop installed on it. I did get it flying last year and it is very fast. Actually saw 220 indicated over the field on one level pass. I am sure it will go faster if I wanted to push it. Front gear door makes a huge difference.

Steve Crisp  
Chewelah WA

[Steve bought N64SB, Steve Backnak's Falco]

I had a professional aerobatic pilot fly with me on N1443D a few weeks back. His name is Francis Barros, five-times Brazilian unlimited aerobatic champion. Francis flies an Extra 330 SC, has competed in the WAC a few times and has also competed in the Red Bull Race Challenger category. It was his first flight on a Falco. Well, needless to say I was quite impressed with the performance of the Falco in the hands of such a trained and skilled pilot. I wish I had a camera on board to capture the maneuvers. A lot went on. For example: the Falco easily snaps on the vertical upline with enough energy left over for a clean hammerhead at the top. He also did a four-point vertical roll in the upline. All within the aircraft's G limits.

The Falco is such an incredible aircraft that never ceases to amaze me.

Eduardo Letti  
N1443D



Eduardo Letti and Francis Barros



Falco Builders Dinner