

*Eccentric maverick, adventurer and legal warrior. He flew to Sydney in his Piper Cub, and aims to complete a circumnavigation. **By Philip Whiteman.***

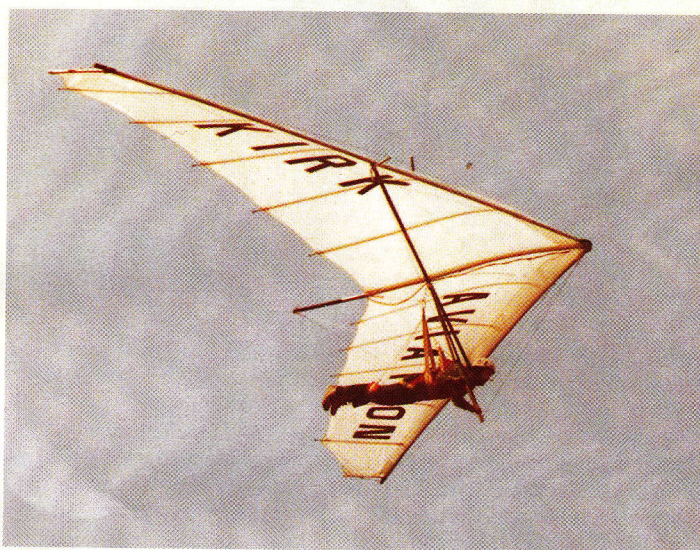


Above left: Maurice Kirk's father, the original 'Flying Vet'

Above: for years, Maurice has been a great exponent of the Stampe.

Below left: University Air Squadron days.

Below: hang-gliding venture quickly led to broken bones.



"Champion of individuals' rights, or a public menace?"

schoolboy's pocket (his en route video suggests that stowing maps in a tightly-crumpled ball is typical Kirk practice). Maurice was supposed to have measured track distances and calculated times, but—minutes before the off—had still not done so. As he also seemed to have lost his scale rule, I made a quick check of distance against the scale printed along the margin. On seeing me do this, his face clouded. "Didn't they teach you anything!" he snarled, "Measure it against the longitude lines, for God's sake..."

Having wished him luck and bade him farewell, I retreated to watch from the warmth and comfort of Biggin's terminal building. Very quickly after getting airborne the heavily-laden silver Cub disappeared into cloud.

"That," said James Gilbert, standing beside me, "may be the last we see of Maurice Kirk."

Five minutes later, as I was driving south along the airport boundary toward Biggin village and the M25, I looked up and glimpsed the outline of a Cub, made a phantasm by the enveloping cloud and heading in the opposite direction. Could Kirk have become lost already? Or was he coming back because of the impossibility of the conditions? I pulled

over and waited to see if he did indeed return. The steady stream of departing competitors continued unbroken, all modern machines with IFR capability, but there was no sign of the lonely Cub. I climbed back into my car and drove on feeling gloomy. Perhaps this really would be the end of Maurice Kirk...

Had I the measure of Maurice's immense experience, or some idea of how steeped he was in aviation, I might not have been so concerned. It was his father who first earned the 'Flying Vet' title, when he did his farm rounds in a BA Swallow during the late 1940s. Kirk senior took the four-year-old Maurice for his first flight from Westonzoyland in 1948. When Maurice took up studying veterinary science at Bristol University, he became one of the 150 or so applicants for the seventeen places available in the University Air Squadron. As he had been the youngest member of the Devon and Somerset Gliding Club, one might have thought he had an advantage. However, there was one skeleton in the cupboard. "I had visited eight countries by that time..." he says, "One too many."

Arriving late for his interview, thanks to one of his 1927 Austin Seven's many breakdowns, he had to sit on his hands when asked