



This page: with drinking companion actor Oliver Reed; Maurice's D.H.2 replica—here with broken prop—was seriously considered for the London to Sydney race; attending to a spaniel at the practice in Barry; one of many accidents in a long flying career.

everything you do is associated with some sort of fine and you cannot do anything without permission."

In the early seventies, short-field types like the Auster were giving way to new Cessnas and Pipers, and the emphasis was perhaps shifting to a more glossy type of flying. In reaction to this, Maurice and a small group of like-minded individuals set up the very informal Rough School of Flying.

A ready source of cheap old aeroplanes existed just across the Channel. At the time, the French were either neglecting, or actively divesting themselves of British aeroplanes (especially the wooden ones) and there were all sorts of interesting Continental stuff (like Stampes) available too. Maurice happily joined the ranks of those importing machines from France.

It wasn't easy and, frequently, it was barely legal. Maurice remembers flying over to recover a Rapide, only to discover that the French had decided to put a match to it shortly before he arrived. The engines were the only salvageable items. Other aircraft had to be spirited away before officials arrived to scotch the movement of aeroplanes the owners were otherwise very happy to sell and be rid of. Of course, there was the whole issue of how they should be moved. Untroubled by formalities like airworthiness documentation, Maurice tended to rely on his own judgement of what could, and could not, safely be flown away.

Even if you discount some of what he tells you, he went to the most extraordinary lengths in getting his machine. In one instance, when it became clear that Maurice would not be allowed to fly out one particular Jodel he had just bought, he concealed himself in the long grass on the aerodrome until everything fell quiet for the usual, long French lunch break. Seizing the moment, Maurice emerged from hiding, beetled over to the machine, set the throttle and switches, and swung the Jodel's prop. When the engine started, his hosts proved rather more alert than he had allowed for; people poured out of the clubhouse and quickly commandeered the fire truck to block the runway. They were too slow—

after a moment of Keystone Cops hilarity, he was away with his prize.

This moment of triumph looked to be short-lived. As Maurice climbed away, the cockpit began to fill with smoke. "I thought this was it. I was certainly going to end up in prison this time." Half expecting to lose the door, Maurice unlatched the canopy... and the smoke cleared. Once the little Potez engine had burned off its coating of oil, it continued to run smoothly all the way back to England.

To help bring back machines from France, Maurice roped in other young pilots, eager to build up their flying hours. The whole import business was highly informal. "Sometimes we didn't quite make Customs at each end," he admits. Maurice knew that his days as an aircraft importer were numbered, but he was caught out in a way he had not anticipated.

The trouble started in France. Maurice accompanied a low-time PPL, collecting hours for his commercial, to Morlaix to collect an aeroplane, but the export paperwork was not ready. Having enjoyed a boozy meal with his French host, Maurice decided he had better leave the piloting duties for the return flight to his less experienced companion. Finding difficulty in contacting Bournemouth, they changed frequency to Southampton. Hearing nothing, Maurice seized the hand-mike and sang the Marseillaise to his companion, to check the mike was working. Unfortunately, this was the first transmission heard by the Southampton controller—"something the media later got totally out of proportion".

The weather was poor, and Maurice's companion requested information. This came back, but Maurice drew further ire from the controller by telling him that he was wrong—a technical point on which Maurice was correct, a fact the court later appeared to ignore. Maurice feels they were influenced by newspaper reports that he had announced himself as 'Captain Kirk of the *Star Ship Cessna*'. He did talk to ATC of bagging the hares hopping around the runway threshold, as they were on finals, something that did not perhaps help his case, even though he has always claimed that it was nothing more than a ▶