



50 Years of Keenair & the Liverpool Flying School

Five Decades of G.A. Endeavour

Brian Jones

The story of the Keen family companies at Liverpool Airport

Foreword

For 50 years the aircraft and activities of Liverpool Aero Club, Keenair Services, Keenair Ltd, Liverpool Flying School, Keenair Charter and the company owners Jim and later Martin, Kath and Janet Keen have provided a great deal of interest for the enthusiast. Their family business, established in 1963, has become a cornerstone of general aviation at Liverpool and remains so today. Over the years, thousands of pilots who are flying today both for pleasure and commercially, owe their initial training to LAC/LFS. To attempt to document the story of the companies and their aircraft will be no mean feat!

I have pondered long as to how to split this story up into manageable sections, whether by decade or by company activity. I've gone for the later approach, so will start off with the 'core' operation, the flying school. I make no apology though for the length and detail of the final section, although the ownership and operation of older and charismatic aircraft is only an appendix to the company story, they are of greatest interest to the enthusiast!

Credits and Thanks

Due to the variety of activity over an extended period, this is longest and in many ways the most detailed of the company histories I have written. Fifty years of Airport movement records kept painstakingly by Phil Butler, Tony Williams, Brian Jones, Paul Ellison, Dave Graham and others provide the fleet details. Records and articles in local enthusiast magazines 'Flypast', 'EGGP', 'North West Air News' and '09/27' help greatly, particularly a 1986 article of mine in 'EGGP' which forms the basis of this completely new article for the forum. Also a myriad of enthusiast publications, registers, periodicals and www.caa.co.uk/GINFO website's historical record in the public domain. Thanks to Phil Butler and Dave Graham for their backing and particularly to Martin and Janet Keen for their encouragement and comments on the initial draft. I am always aware that while I am strong on the aircraft operated, it is the people and personalities that make such an organisation tick. Jim and later Martin Keen in particular have made this story possible through five decades of endeavour.

Brian Jones

THE FLYING SCHOOLS 1963 - current LIVERPOOL AERO CLUB

Early Days

Jim Keen's interest in aviation at Liverpool extends right back to July 1933 when he persuaded his mother to permit him and a friend to go up in one of the first pleasure flight trips of the day. For a few wartime years, Jim was employed as a fitter by Lockheed's at Speke, possibly lying about his age to get the job, working on Mustangs, Thunderbolts and the like. An interest in American aircraft was awakened and a desire to fly and own such aircraft an ambition. National Service in the late 40s followed, out in Palestine. Back at Liverpool he learned to fly at Speke on Auster and Tiger Moth aircraft of the flying club in the 50s.

It was in 1963 that Mr Jim Keen was instrumental in establishing the Liverpool Aero Club (LAC). He spotted a gap in the provision of services from Speke, following the demise of the Tiger Moth equipped 'Merseyside and North Wales Flying Group' the previous year. Plans for a new Aero Club were hatched in the preceding years along with a group of light aircraft owners, who felt they were not being properly served by the ailing M&NWFG. Certainly Arthur Haggis (Auster G-ARCS), Mr Sprague (Terrier G-ARNO) and Tom Clarke (Auster G-APUW) were involved in discussions along with pilot Jim Keen to form an Aero Club for qualified pilots and aircraft owners. However, it was up to Jim Keen to get the new Aero Club up and running. What emerged during early 1963 was more than a just a member's Club; an organisation not only for qualified pilots, but also flight training. Jim Keen appointed the first CFI, a very necessary step on the path to CAA recognition and formation of the 'Liverpool Aero Club'.



5 year old James Keen at the Airport's opening display—1 July 1933. He was the youngest person to fly that day and the event clearly fired his life-long interest in aviation. *Thelwell Collection*

Jim Keen and his CFI decided not to use the traditional, but now out-dated Tiger Moth or Auster aircraft, instead opted for the modern training designs now arriving in Britain from the USA. Initial equipment of LAC was a fairly new 2-seat, Piper Colt 108 trainer, acquired and operated with the assistance of Rent-a-Plane Ltd (a subsidiary of importers CSE Aviation). This Colt, G-ARGO, was during the first year supplemented by member Frank Pott's Chipmunk G-AOST. For the second summer of operation a further Colt, G-ARKN, was acquired from Rent-a-Plane. A third Colt was added in January 1965, however the life of this aircraft at Liverpool was short, as only a month later, on 14th



Liverpool Aero Club's first aircraft was this Piper PA-22 Colt 108—G-ARGO. *Don Stephens*

February, it was blown over by a British Eagle Britannia aircraft which was engine running on the west apron of Liverpool Airport. Soon after, Tri-Pacer G-ARGY was acquired, this 4-seater brought the Club fleet back up to 3 aircraft and provided an added dimension as a tourer for the use of suitably qualified members.

With the LAC successfully operating, Jim Keen set his sight on older aircraft, being part of a group that acquired 4 Tiger Moths and a Stampe aircraft from Ireland. More on these aircraft later. In 1967 the LAC fleet rose to 4 Tri-Pacer and Colt aircraft and use of a Tiger Moth, G-ANKK. This position remained constant for 1968; however Jim Keen acquired a Dragon Rapide G-AEML in the closing days of 1967, again more on this aircraft later.

All Metal Aircraft

After six years of operation of the metal framed, fabric covered Colt and Tri-Pacer, in 1969 a number of developments commenced, which shaped activity through the 70s and well beyond. The LAC fleet was added to, and eventually replaced by the acquisition of the low-wing, wide-track undercarriage, all metal constructed Piper Cherokee.

During the summer of 1970 the aircraft were moved out of the Liverpool Corporation general aviation hangar, No.39, and into No.4 hangar. The clubrooms had already been established in the external side-offices of No.4, so the move consolidated operations and maintenance around the same building. Being the sole tenant allowed for secure maintenance of aircraft and gave space for working on aircraft other than those in the LAC fleet and Jim Keen. Also in 1970 competition arrived at Liverpool, particularly the arrival of the Cheshire Air Training School. Although competition was initially viewed as not really desirable, it worked to expand the market, with both LAC and CATS flourishing. At this time LAC offered PPL, Night, IMC and Aerobatic training for members, with an annual membership of £5, and the per hour hire rate for the Colt at £6.75, Cherokee 140 £7.50 and Keenair Service's Apache at £23.00.

KEENAIR SERVICES 'LIVERPOOL FLYING SCHOOL'

In 1974 the Club fleet expanded to 5 Cherokees and a Colt. By 1977 the flying school had expanded further to 7 Cherokees, with the final Colt, G-ARGO in its last full year of use. Progressively during the mid 1970s the trading name 'Liverpool Aero Club Ltd' was dropped (the company finally wound-up in late '85). Flying training now being operated by the 'Liverpool Flying School' (LFS) as part of Keenair Services Ltd (KAS). The gradual change of name better reflecting an emphasis on flying training rather than as a pilot's club.

In 1979, towards the end of the year, 3 of the older LAC Cherokees were advertised for sale, although G-AVWF, G-



If its aviation

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Keenair War Birds Vintage and Historical Aircraft

AWEU and G-AVFZ all continued in use for a further year or so before sale or retirement. Two newer, additional Cherokees were acquired by Keenair from Denmark. During 1979 the corporate 'image' was smartened with a uniform blue tail with a KAS 'Speedbird' logo applied across the fleet of G-AVGK, G-AVFZ, G-AWEU, G-AWTM, G-BBEV, G-BGTR, G-BGTS and the Keenair twins. Also at this time, locally owned Cessna 182P G-HUFF was available to members for touring, so acquired the KAS logo on the tail. It was used by Keenair providing pleasure flights at the Liverpool Air Displays June 1981 and June 1982.

Following the withdrawal of the three older Cherokees during the winter of 1981/82, three Tomahawk aircraft were acquired by Keenair. Being lighter, cheaper to operate and two-seaters, it was intended that they would take the bulk of circuit training work from the heavier Cherokee aircraft. They did not prove entirely satisfactory, the Cherokee being preferred by pilots and instructors, so all three Tomahawks departed early in 1985. The sole Cherokee 180, G-AVGK with its 4-seat capacity was used as a tourer during the 1970, however in summer '78 and again from early 1979 until late 1985, it spent much of the time operating out of Caernarfon airfield on pilot training and pleasure flight work. At Liverpool between late 1979 and early 1985, 4-seat capacity at Liverpool was provided by using member's, or leased, Cessna 172/182 or AA-5 Traveller aircraft.

An older type to operate with the KAS fleet was a Piper Cub G-TUGG, this arrived in June 1984, entering service in September after a re-spray. It was used frequently in a variety of roles by Keenair. It was ideal for tail-wheel conversion training and also used for advertisement banner towing and aerial photography



The main base of operations from summer 1970 until August 2000 was Hangar 4 seen here in its last days. The 'clubrooms' alongside No.4 hangar were reputedly constructed, in part, from aircraft crates left behind by Lockheed's. Graham Ward



DH.89 Dragon Rapide, G-AEML with Piper Tri-Pacer G-ARGY just visible behind.

Don Stephens

work. Its blue and white colours were revised early '86 to reflect the Cherokee fleet colours, along with winged 'KAS' tail logo. It departed Liverpool February 1987, being replaced by a Cessna 172 G-ENII.

The Unanticipated

On 27th May 1986, the founder and driving force behind Liverpool Aero Club, Liverpool Flying School and Keenair Services, Mr Jim Keen died unexpectedly at home at the early age of 57. In a period of 23 years he built up a large organisation at Liverpool from scratch. Over 50 different aircraft had been operated in that time, including a substantial number of interesting warbirds. Control of the Keenair companies passed to his wife Kath, and son Martin, so the story continues.

Business Continues into the Late '80s

Summer '86 witnessed a smartening of the 'Keenair' image, with a revised logo and colour scheme being applied to the Flying School fleet of Cherokees G-BGTR, G-BGTS, G-KEAN (the former G-AWTM until January '86) and G-AVGK along with Piper Cub G-TUGG. The Flying School offered PPL, Night Rating, IMC and R/T courses, tail-wheel conversion and aerobatic training. While Keenair offered aerial advertising, aerial photography, war-bird flying and an aircraft sales service. The maintenance side continued to keep the engineers busy. War-bird activity in the hangar continued with work on their C-47A Dakota, 4 Nord 3202s, while Keenair Warbirds West operated a Stinson L.5c Sentinel.

LIVERPOOL FLYING SCHOOL LTD

In subsequent years there were changes to the Flying School fleet. Some of the older Cherokees were disposed of, G-KEAN was sold locally in 1987, and after maintenance reregistered as G-TEWS, later leaving for Manchester May 1988. Cherokee 180 G-AVGK which had arrived at Liverpool back in 1971, was brought back from Caernarfon during 1987 and prepared for sale in April 1988 to local new owners, although it remained available for Flying School use for a number of years more. The Piper Cub G-TUGG left for Northern Ireland via Carlisle February 1987, a week after the arrival of its replacement, G-ENII a Cessna 172. This aircraft was used for touring, but also for banner towing, a new activity for Keenair.

LFS were invited by the ARV sales agents to evaluate and consider purchase of their lightweight British design. G-DEXP was demonstrated at Liverpool to Keenair and CATS 4th September 1987. With its lower running costs, prospects for a sale looked good, indeed c/no.025 was registered as G-POOL and seen at Sandown in LFS style colours and story spread that Keenair had purchased 2, placed options on a further 3 and would become an ARV service centre. A further attempt to lure LFS into an ARV purchase brought G-BMWG for three weeks

evaluation by LFS, 18th March to 12th April 1988. With hindsight, Martin Keen made the right decision in not purchasing the lightweight type, as they did not prove durable, unlike the tough and well liked Cherokee.

During 1988 further refinements to the new Corporate image were made. Cherokee G-BGTR was the first to acquire a white 'Liver Bird' logo on the tail, replacing the KAS' logo. The aircraft were named in April 1988 eg G-BGTR as "Liverbird I", G-BGTS as "Liverbird II". The Cessna 172 G-ENII joined the Cherokees into the blue/white LFS scheme May 1988 and became "Liverbird III". Cherokee G-BGTS was damaged on the ground 17th June 1989 and taken away by road, being replaced by local resident Cherokee G-AYKV which was purchased, re-registered and re-painted in a revised scheme, appropriately as G-LFSI, July 1989, named "Liverbird I", so demoting G-BGTR to "Liverbird II". At this time the flying school fleet was down to just the two Cherokees and the Cessna 172. However other aircraft were available for the use of members. These included Cherokee 180 G-AVGK until June '90, TB-9 G-BLCM and Halcyon Flying Group's Cherokee Arrow G-HALC which arrived Liverpool August 1990. A couple of other aircraft were available too, while owned for brief periods by A.Martlew, these being the appropriately registered Rallye G-OLFS (formerly G-AYYZ) during the second half of 1988 and G-BDFR a Fuji Fa.200 during 1989.

A change of policy by Martin Keen re-introduced the Piper Tomahawk into the LFS fleet, to provide a dedicated two-seat trainer. G-BLYC was purchased January 1989; with G-BSFC following in July 1990, becoming G-LFSA "Liverbird III" on re-



By the 90s the Tomahawk was the standard trainer.

G Ward

spray before entering service in October, while G-BLYC became "Liverbird IV". Meanwhile the Cessna 172 G-ENII had departed for Fenland May 1990 having been sold. Cherokee G-BSGL arrived from Shobdon March 1991 and was used by LFS with their logo on the tail, acquiring the name "Liverbird V". This aircraft suffered the indignity of a forced landing in a field near Frodsham December 1992, but was back in the air, in a new green and white colour scheme late March '93.

For a while the expanded LFS stood at 6 aircraft. For example on 1st January 1992 Cherokees G-BGTR, G-BSGL, G-LFSI, Tomahawks G-BLYC, G-LFSA and Seneca G-BPAD, along with 'when required' use of TB-9 G-BLCM.

During May 1990, LFS had moved back into the business of offering twin ratings and other advanced flying courses with the delivery of a Piper Seneca G-BPAD. Unfortunately on 15th July 1992 while on a flight from Leeds returning to Liverpool, the aircraft crashed west of Long Preston, near Clitheroe, Lancashire at around 4pm. The sole occupant, an experienced flying instructor, being killed. The AAIB report, though, was inconclusive as to any possible cause.

Continuing Developments Mid to Late 90's

LFS were by now a very well established company and well respected. Although airline and passenger activity had moved off the North Airfield in 1986, LFS continued to trade from hangar No.4 and associated clubrooms, despite a long taxi to the active runway on the South Airfield. One activity to raise it's business profile was a Corporate Day on 26th June 1994 employing the whole fleet on air experience flights, with Cherokees G-BGTR, G-BSGL, G-LFSI, Tomahawks G-BLYC, G-LFSA and Chipmunk G-BBRV.

Cherokee G-BLYC was repainted and became G-LFSB in November 1994, followed by Cherokee G-BGTR which became G-LFSC in September 1995. The next new acquisition being a third Tomahawk, G-BNPT, in August 1996, entering service as G-LFSD in November the same year, however in the other direction Cherokee G-LFSI departed at the end of 1996. So early in 1997 the fleet stood at Cherokees G-LFSC, G-BSGL with Tomahawks G-LFSA, G-LFSB, G-LFSD. A Cherokee Arrow 200 G-BAXT arrived from Woodvale by road in mid June 1997 for long-term attention. Following a two year rebuild, it re flew in March 1999 it was in fleet colours, with registration G-LFSE. It was not to operate with the fleet for long, departing on sale to Simflight at Bournemouth mid August 2000. Ever since formation in 1963 LAC and now LFS had used Piper aircraft for two seat instruction work. This changed with the arrival of G-BSRC a Cessna 150M from Haverfordwest in August 1998. After operating with LFS during the winter, it entered the hangar mid April, to re-emerge from maintenance as G-LFSF in the club blue/white colours during August. However, also in August, Tomahawk G-LFSD suffered a heavy landing during circuits, causing the nose wheel to collapse. The aircraft being repaired during the following winter. Since 1992 LFS had operated



Chipmunk GBBRV/WD347—One of the many fabulous Keen aircraft seen and enjoyed at LPL over the years *Brian Thompson*

privately owned Cherokee G-BSGL, which wore the company 'Liverbird' logo on the tail, this association ended early 2000. Another rebuild project was acquired with the arrival by road in May 2000 of long-term Liverpool resident G-AYAA a Cherokee 180E following an accident at Carlisle. After rebuild it was to emerge in fleet blue/white colours with red 'Liverbird' tail logo as G-LFSG January 2001. One of the LFS Cherokee fleet, G-LFSC made a heavy landing at Liverpool on return from Blackpool 13th June 2000, the nose wheel burst and a prop-strike occurred. The aircraft was repaired, re-entering service during March 2001. Meanwhile a temporary replacement arrived in the form of Cherokee G-AYKW, which operated with LFS from mid June 2000 until early March 2001

2000, End of an Era—and a Fresh Start for the Next

Throughout the 1990s LFS faced much competition from other Liverpool resident flying schools, Cheshire Air Training School (CATS), Air Nova, Deltair, Merseyside Aviation and from 1998 the newly moved-in, Ravenair. Keenair as a company also faced difficult conditions as, following the north airfield terminal closure in April 1986 the area had gradually become quite run-down. As the developers moved in to convert the former terminal and No.1 and No.2 hangars to non-aviation uses, so a programme of demolition resulted in, by the very late 1990s Keenair's No.4 hangar being the only one still standing. Indeed, Keenair became the last aviation tenant on the north airfield. Meanwhile the airport management were slow to react to the demands of the GA community for new permanent facilities on the south airfield adjacent to runway 09/27. After many false starts, work started in May 2000 on a new hangar for Keenair, alongside the new GA apron 'Kilo', at the east end of the south airfield. The new hangar was the first to be constructed for the GA community (the Airport developed hangars were difficult to access by GA aircraft as they were sited at a prime location on the main passenger aircraft apron) and gave LFS a temporary advantage over their new main competition, Ravenair. Keen companies had occupied No.4 hangar for 30 years, so the move



After 30 years, Keenair moved to its new home retaining the name 'Hangar 4' on the Southern Airfield in August 2000

Graham Ward

to new premises was a bold step, resulting in greatly improved operating conditions. Commencing on 22nd August, within a week all the aircraft, offices, equipment and spares were moved from the north airfield to the smart, shiny, new facilities on the south airfield. On 29th August 2000, the cessation of aviation related activities on the North Airfield after 70 years was appropriately marked with fly-bys by Martin Keen in Stearman G-BRUJ.

A New decade , Business Continues Apace

At the time of the move of premises, August 2000, the Flying School were operating Cherokee G-LFSC and G-AYKW, Tomahawks G-LFSA, G-LFSB and G-LFSD along with Cessna 150M G-LFSF. Cherokee G-AYAA/G-LFSG and Cherokee G-LFSC being under a period of repair following landing accidents, both being back in the air during Spring 2001. However Tomahawk G-LFSB which was just completing a period of maintenance at the time of the move, was sold, departing to Pembury in September 2000. The 'odd-man-out' Cessna 150M G-LFSF departed in late April 2001 for a new owner in Belgium. However, in the other direction Tomahawk G-BOZM arrived from Biggin Hill in late June, to emerge in late July as G-LFSH with red 'Liverbird' logo on tail, but retained its original colours for a few years to come. Although LFS had featured on the initial Keenair website, the Liverpool Flying School posted their own, independent, website during Spring 2001 with their own URL. So for summer 2001 the fleet consisted of Cherokee G-LFSC and G-LFSG, Tomahawks G-LFSA, G-LFSD and G-LFSH. Towards the end of the year in mid November 2001, Cherokee G-LFSC had the red 'Liverbird' logo painted out and departed for new owners at Full Sutton, Yorkshire. Its departure marked the end of 22 years with LFS, initially as G-BGTR.

In mid December 2002 Tomahawk G-BWNR arrived from Manchester to join LFS. Two former LFS machines returned during 2003 as temporary cover during maintenance of the Club aircraft, with Cherokees G-LFSC from 1st March to 30th April and G-AYKW 14th to 28th October. Otherwise the 2003 fleet had settled down at a Cherokee and 4 Tomahawks. The fleet remained constant through 2004 the only change of note, being the re-registration of G-BWNR as G-LFSM. On 9th September 2005 G-LFSD suffered a nose undercarriage collapse and prop



The fleet are named *Liverbird 1* through to *Liverbird 6* BPJ

strike on landing at Hawarden. The aircraft which had been with LFS just on 10 years was dismantled and bought back to Liverpool, but found to be beyond economic repair, so became a source of spares. A replacement arrived in early November in the form of another Tomahawk G-BNYV, which became G-LFSN before entering service. An additional aircraft arrived June 2007 in the form of a four seat, Cessna F.172G G-ATGO, quickly re-registered as G-CESS, no doubt to mark it as the CESSna in the fleet! This tourer was operated until September 2009, when it departed en route to a new owner in Serbia. Its place as a tourer was taken in July 2010 by purchasing locally based Cherokee Arrow IV G-JANO, which immediately became G-LFSR on repaint into 'corporate' blue and white colours. With its greater capacity, speed and retractable undercarriage, it has proved popular with the School's more experienced members.

For some five years or so, the Keenair fleet has presented a smart image for the company out on the GA parking, with the whole fleet in matching blue and white colours, with an upright 'Liverbird' logo on the tail. This corporate image was enhanced



VIP guests at the large Flying Display held in 1970 to celebrate 60 years of flying on Merseyside. The display was organised by Jim Keen, then current operator of the Liverpool Flying School to mark 60 years since the formation of the first Liverpool Flying School by Henry G Melly in 1910 at Waterloo Sands, Crosby. Guests, from left to right were, Miss Eileen Melly and Mrs H. Melly—daughter and wife of Henry Melly, The Mayor and Mayoress of Sefton, George Cregean—Editor of the Liverpool Daily Post & Echo and the late Jim Keen.
(Photo courtesy of Malcolm Coates, a family descendent of Henry G Melly)

in early summer 2010, with the whole fleet given individual names, running from 'Liverbird 1' through to 'Liverbird 6'. Throughout 2011 and 2012 the fleet has remained constant, with the Cherokee Arrow IV, a Cherokee 180E and four Tomahawk aircraft. These six aircraft provide a good mix for both the competent private pilot for touring, and for cross-country and circuit training work for the PPL trainee.

Today, the Liverpool Flying School offers full tuition and courses leading to award of: National Private Pilot's Licence (NPPL), Joint Aviation Requirements Private Pilot's Licence (JAR-PPL), Instrument Meteorological Conditions Rating (IMC) and Night Rating Qualifications. Trial flying lessons and flights are offered in the Tomahawk, Cherokee and Tiger Moth. More can be found on www.liverpoolflying school.com. In late 2011, membership stands at around 250 qualified pilots and trainees. The school has built-up a vast experience, with well qualified staff. The current CFI, Phil Ryan having over 25 years of experience as CFI and examiner. LFS pride themselves as being able to deliver a professional and friendly service with a personal touch.

COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS

While the flying school operated by Jim Keen and more recently his son Martin, is itself celebrating a very significant fiftieth anniversary in 2013, both Jim and Martin have helped mark various anniversaries and events in the Liverpool area.

The Flying Years, 1970

On 1st August 1970 Jim Keen organised a major 'Air Spectacular' along the coast of Merseyside. A two hour flypast between Speke and Woodvale, involving some 50 aircraft including a Boeing 737, Viscount, Nord 262, Britannia, Vulcan, Spitfire, Mosquito, Puss Moth, Tiger Moth, 5 Hawker Hunters and 13 Folland Gnats. Flying his Stampe bi-plane G-ATIR, Mr Keen dropped a commemorative scroll by parachute onto the site of the 1910 Flying School on Crosby Shore, where it was received by the widow of Mr. Henry Melly, one of Merseyside's first aviators and founder, 60 years earlier, of the first flying school in the region.

End of Northern Airfield Aviation Related Activities, 2000

The very last powered aircraft to move on the north airfield, was Stearman G-BRUJ. Rolled out from a near empty No.4 hangar at 1015 on Tuesday 29th August 2000, it was taxied around the deserted apron by Martin Keen for press and TV camera crew. Shortly after disappearing down towards the south airfield, Martin reappeared over the trees for several impressive passes to mark the end of 70 years of aviation on the site.

75th Anniversary of Liverpool Airport, 2008

Although not involved directly, Martin Keen threw his facilities open to FoLA and Classic Aviation to enable 15 local pleasure flights in their Dragon Rapide G-AGTM to operate through Hangar 4 over the last weekend of June.

Centenary of Flying on Merseyside, 2009

The first flight on Merseyside was made at Aintree Racecourse on Monday 15th November 1909 by famous showman and pioneer aviator, Samuel Franklin Cody. He was there in an attempt to win a valuable prize put up by the Hartley family for the first Liverpool to Manchester flight. Poor



For the Airport's 75th Anniversary celebrations in 2008, Martin Keen made his facilities available to allow FoLA and Classic Aviation to operate 15 local pleasure flights in Dragon Rapide G-AGTM over two days.
Maureen Hardwick



Above—FoLA Vice-Chair Keith Hardwick and Martin Keen celebrate after the successful Melly formation flight to Manchester in 2011
Maureen Hardwick

Below—In 2009, Martin Keen recreated Cody's failed Liverpool—Manchester flight by flying from Aintree to Eccleston in Tiger Moth—G-AMCK.
Liverpool Echo





A short-lived Keenair venture was aircraft sales with the award of a Beechcraft Sales Agency status in 1969. In June of that year a new Musketeer, G-AWTS arrived at Liverpool. *Brian Jones*

weather intervened, so it was 29th December before his attempt, which came to an end at Valencia Farm, Eccleston. Working with FoLA, on 29th December 2009, Martin Keen recreated the flight in his Tiger Moth G-AMCK. Initially flying to Aintree, where he landed to talk to the press and dignitaries, and then on over the site of Cody's forced landing before return to Liverpool Airport.

Centenary of First Liverpool—Manchester Flight, 2011

The leading early pioneer aviator on Merseyside was Henry Melly. It was the 60th Anniversary of the setting up of his flying school in 1910 that Jim Keen had commemorated in 1970. On 7th July 1911, Henry Melly was the first aviator to successfully fly all the way from Liverpool to Manchester, and to show just how quickly aviation had progressed, returned home to Liverpool the same day. On 7th July 2011, in association with FoLA, a LFS formation of a Cherokee and four Tomahawk aircraft re-enacted the flight routing from Liverpool to Waterloo Sands (Melly's departure point) then on over Trafford Park (which is now on the site of the golf course Melly landed at for lunch) then back to Waterloo via Mossley Hill (Melly's home) and a landing at Liverpool.

Fifty Years at Liverpool Airport, 2013

It is rare for a family owned company to operate for fifty years, even rarer in the field of aviation. This makes the anniversary in 2013 a very special 'landmark event' for the company.

Formation Flights

A company tradition has become established over the years, to fly a loose formation of assorted company and associated older aircraft on Boxing Day or New Year each year, weather permitting, as the airspace on those days is much quieter than usual.

KEENAIR SERVICES LTD

Keenair Services Ltd was formed in 1968, being officially launched on 17th September, initially to develop his operations into Air Taxi charter, but also look after the non-training activity as Jim Keen diversified his operations into aircraft sales, overhaul work and airfield ownership.

A little before this, following his love of 'classic' aeroplanes, Jim had purchased a Dragon Rapide, G-AEML in the closing days of 1967. The aircraft was little flown, proving somewhat expensive to operate. One of its few passenger flights being to Valley in August 1968 with a party of MSAE members on the day of the RAF Valley 'At Home' air display. First advertised for sale in late 1968, it eventually left for Booker following sale, in November 1969. However, the Dragon Rapide showed a demand for an air-taxi twin based at Liverpool. The Dragon Rapide

itself was certainly not the right type, so in October 1968 an ex-College of Air Training Apache 160, G-ARJW was acquired from Shackleton Aviation, offering capacity for 5 passengers. Soon after delivery, the aircraft was resprayed in a smart black and white scheme, with a 'Liverbird' motif on the tail and was named "Liverbird I" by the reigning Miss Liverpool.

To supplement the Apache, a Cherokee Six G-BBFV was used when required from a local owner who obtained it in late 1973, being re-sprayed in May 1974. A new role for Keenair, using this aircraft, was for parachutist-drop work. Its flying with Keenair was brought to a premature halt, while being flown by the owner, with an accident at Penrhos airfield, Pwllheli during June 1975. Although taken by road to C.S.E. Aviation at Kidlington for repair, it never returned to Liverpool.

An Aztec, G-ARHL from Biggin Hill was demonstrated to Keenair in February 1971. However, despite the Apache's lack of capacity and luggage lift, G-ARJW remained in use for a further two years. Eventually, in March 1974 'Juliet Whiskey' was traded-in with Spooner aviation for an ex-Ethiopian Aztec 250C G-BBVG. The aircraft soon acquired the stylised 'winged' KAS logo on the tail, but did not remain at Liverpool long, being replaced by G-BCPF in November of the same year. This newer aircraft had been demonstrated to Keenair in early August while still N6748Y.

Beechcraft Sales Agency

An early short-lived Keenair venture was into aircraft sales with the award of a Beechcraft Sales Agency status in 1969. In June of that year a new Musketeer, G-AWTS arrived at Liverpool. No further Beechcraft were acquired, and no direct sales ever appeared to have been made by the Agency. After some club flying, the Musketeer itself was successfully sold in April 1971.

Caernarfon Airfield

During 1975 the lease on Llandwrog airfield, to the west of Caernarfon was acquired from Lord Newborough by Arfonair, a company formed jointly by Jim Keen and Cyril McKenzie. For publicity the airfield was visited twice from Liverpool by Aztec G-BCPF on June 16th. In addition to restoring the surface of one of the runways to usable status, fire-fighting and re-fuelling facilities were established, a club house with a public restaurant was converted from the former watch tower and a new hangar built. The main Keenair resident here in the period 1978 to 1985 was Cherokee 180 G-AVGK, which was used for sight-seeing pleasure flights over the Menai Straits and Snowdonia, air taxi and flying training work.

A cherished ambition held by Jim Keen was to establish an aviation museum at Caernarfon. Indeed there was a threat in the late 1970s that the whole Keenair operation might move out of Liverpool Airport, now that Keenair itself had taken on the lease



The main Keenair resident at Caernarfon in the period 1978 to 1985 was Cherokee 180 G-AVGK, (but seen here in April '83 at Liverpool) which was used for sight-seeing pleasure flights over the Menai Straits and Snowdonia, air taxi and flying training work. *John Pope Collection*

of Llandwrog. Apart from the Cherokee detachment, the only Keenair aircraft to be at Caernarfon for any period of time were there for storage due to the hangar at Liverpool being overcrowded. Such aircraft being AA-5 G-BDCK between April 1982 and October 1984; Starduster G-KEEN for a few months from May 1982; Aztec G-BBCM for two months late 1983 and Nord 3202 N2256K between April 1984 and February 1986. During late 1985 the lease on Caernarfon Airfield was sold to the Snowdon Mountain Railway Company who formed Snowdon Mountain Aviation Company to operate the airfield and establish an Air Museum there in 1987, regrettably Jim Keen did not live to see his concept become reality, even if through the action of others.

Air Taxi Expansion

The Aztec 250 proved to be a useful aircraft for air-taxi work, a second aircraft being acquired during March 1976 in the form of G-BAWV to join G-BCPF. At this time Keenair also managed, hangared, maintained and operated the growing fleet of Alexandra Aviation from their acquisition of Aztec G-AXAX in July 1975, Islander G-AWVY January 1977 and Navajo G-BXBX December 1977, to the fleet's departure to Biggin Hill in September 1979. The aircraft were available for use by Keenair when not required by their owner. The Islander particularly being used for a number of charters, including taking parachutists aloft at weekends.

During 1974 and 1975 the main business with the two Keenair Aztecs was to the Isle of Man, Kirkwall, Cardiff, Swansea, Aberdeen and Keenair's base at Llandwrog. Other airfields visited during 1975 being Blackbushe, Dinard, Elvington, Gatwick, Glasgow, Hawarden, Ipswich, Leavesden, Perth, Prestwick, Rochester, Silverstone, Southampton and Valley. Also the Aztecs were at times used on flights to Dounreay for the Nuclear Power Group, as a substitute carrier on Vernair's contract.

At the July 1978 Liverpool Air Show, Keenair provided pleasure flying using Aztecs G-BAWV and G-BCPF. With the departure from Liverpool during 1979 of the Alexandra fleet, and their consequent non-availability for ad-hoc charter work, Keenair's own fleet was expanded with the purchase from Burnthill's of Glasgow as Aztec G-BBCM. The yellow colours were replaced by a silver/grey scheme with a blue 'KAS' logoed tail during July '79. G-BCPF also acquired the blue tail with KAS logo during '80. However, G-BAWV's tail was never repainted to match, as in summer 1980 it was sold locally to Golden Lion Plant Hire Ltd. It was replaced in the Keenair fleet by a Navajo Chieftain, G-BEPU which was obtained from Fairflight in mid-July '80. 'Keenair' cabin titles were quickly applied, however the aircraft flew few revenue flights before leaving at the end of September on sale and export to Denmark.

In January 1981, a local company, Cooper Merseyside Ltd, purchased Turbo Navajo G-BBML for operation under contract with Keenair. It too, quickly acquired 'Keenair' cabin roof titles after arrival at Liverpool. Using the two Aztecs and the Navajo, despite the industrial recession hitting the North-West, in the early 1980's a sound air charter business with a good customer base was being built up. This was given a further boost by another local company, Cassir & Co Ltd purchasing a Cessna Citation1 biz-jet G-BEIZ, and offering it for charter or air ambulance work through Keenair. The aircraft was based at Liverpool from July 1981 until late 1982, although it is thought that few charter flights with this aircraft were ever operated due to the high cost of jet operations.

The loss of Navajo G-BBML in a crash near Creil airfield on the outskirts of Paris on 19th May 1982 involved the deaths of two passengers and Keenair's chief pilot. Subsequently this resulted in a decision to scale down air charter operation. However, this was not immediate, as a replacement Navajo was acquired for air-taxi work by Keenair in August 1982, with G-BEJU arriving from Oxford on lease. The number of passenger revenue flights now operated was decreasing, although for several months from 5th July to 30th September the company transported the morning mail to the Isle of Man, which usually involved 2 to 4 flights each weekday using Navajo and Aztec aircraft. The Navajo was away at Manchester between mid-December '82 and mid-February '83, eventually being returned to Oxford during July '83. A few days before the Navajo departed, Aztec G-BCPF left for a new Biggin Hill based owner. The final Aztec in the fleet, G-BBCM, suffered damage on the apron while parked overnight 2-3rd May 1983 when hit by a 'runaway' parked aircraft! After repair it left for two months in store at Caernarfon, returning to Liverpool in the closing days of 1983 to be readied for delivery



Two very unusual aircraft worked on by Keenair—**Above** a B-25 Mitchell bomber arrived on 23 May 1981 for attention whilst en route from Dublin to an appearance at the Mildenhall Air Fete. And **Below**, during a busy week for the airport in September 1979 a CASA 352 (Ju-52) diverted in while on a delivery flight.

Brian Jones



to a new Birmingham based owner. After nearly 15 years of involvement in air-taxi work from Liverpool using Piper twins, so this chapter in the Keenair story closes. Keenair Services Ltd was formerly wound up during February 1988.

Other Enterprises

Other aviation related activities by Keenair include the supply of AVGAS at Liverpool Airport under franchise between 31st March 1980 and May 1983.

Another field of activity was announced in December 1982, with Keenair becoming agents for the new MBA Micro Bipe and Tiger Cub designs, marketing under the name 'Keenair Microlights'. This business was best conducted away from a busy airport, neither of these designs appearing in Hangar No.4. In a deal not connected with Keenair Microlights, G-MBIK a Wheeler Skycraft Scout arrived at Liverpool during March 1986, registered personally to J.R.Keen, but departed from the hangar during the autumn having never been flown at the Airport.

Aircraft Maintenance

Aircraft maintenance facilities, along with an extensive spares holding have been established in No.4 hangar since 1970, looking after the Keenair fleet, some of the resident privately owned aircraft and other light aircraft. In the mid '80s Keenair offered work on all metal and composite (wood and fabric) construction aircraft. Pressurised aircraft up to 5700kg, and unpressurised aircraft without weight limitation. 50 hour, 150 hour checks, annual and star annual checks, together with defect rectification and all airframe and engine maintenance. Occupation of Hangar No.4 on the North Airfield site continued until summer 2000.

The company's experience working on older aircraft led to several jobs worthy of note. During a particularly busy week for the airport in September 1979 a CASA 352 (Ju-52) diverted in



while on a delivery flight. After arrival from Prestwick on 19th, the faults were fixed and it was able to continue to Biggin Hill on 21st. Another visit by Jeff Hawke provided Jim Keen with an opportunity to work on a B-25 Mitchell bomber, when on 23rd May 1981 the aircraft arrived from Dublin en route to an appearance at the Mildenhall Air Fete. However, while work progressed inside on their own C-47A Dakota N54607 (about which more later), another former Moroccan Air Force aircraft, N54599, a much younger C-47B arrived in October 1984 for preparation before transatlantic delivery to the U.S.A. Owned by Military Aircraft Restoration Inc., it left in mid February '85, initially for Glasgow and then onwards to Iceland and Canada en route to its new home.

Another unusual job was the dismantling of Grumman F8F Bearcat N800H (marked as 121752/106:A). The aircraft arrived by air from Duxford 22nd April 1998, and prepared for return to the USA as roll-on hold cargo, departing Sunday morning 17th May for Seaforth Docks.

An LFS member owned AA-1B Trainer, G-SEXY which was damaged in a force landing at Burscough on 10th February 1994. The aircraft was brought back to Hangar No.4, but was found to be beyond economic repair, despite little external damage. During summer '96 it was repainted in LFS blue and white with the 'Liverbird' logo applied to the tail, and mounted on a trailer for use as a mobile exhibit at events, promoting the LFS. Eventually donated to the Jetstream Club October 2005 as an exhibit and now part of the Speke Aerodrome Heritage Group collection on the North Airfield close to the former terminal, now Crowne Plaza hotel.

The Big Move

After some 30 years as tenants in hangar No.4 on the north airfield, the whole maintenance, Keenair Air Charter and Liverpool Flying School operations moved to a brand new hangar alongside the new GA 'Kilo' apron to the east end of the south airfield during August 2000. This new hangar continued to be known as No.4, and represented both a great investment and a quantum leap in terms of comfort and security. The new hangar is of a similar floor area to the previous premises, so there is space not only to house all the Flying School fleet and some privately owned aircraft, but also room for maintenance of these aircraft and third party work. Engineering work now takes place in a spotlessly clean, dry, heated environment – quite a change from the previous leaky premises! It was not until September 2007 that the apron facing gable-end of the hangar gained a large Keenair star logo and name on the left side and a red 'Liverbird' logo and 'Liverpool Flying School' name on the right.



Keenair's second Aztec EI-BOO arrived in April 1995. After extensive work it entered service in March 1996 as G-JANK
Brian Thompson



Boldly going forward—Keenair's EMB-110 Bandeirante G-BGYT seen here on the 09/27 Spur taxiway with the older, slower and noisier Trislander (G-AZLJ) behind.

Today the engineering department, Keenair Ltd., is the only section of the company to retain the Keen family name. Currently the company offers hangarage, handling and maintenance. Work can be undertaken on EASA and non-EASA aircraft under 2750 kgs of metal, wood and fabric construction. Their many years of expertise in maintaining older aircraft systems brings in interesting third party overhaul work, notably during summer 2011 a rare Miles Gemini, G-AKKB, was in for Keenair's engineering attention and TLC.

KEENAIR CHARTER LTD

The original Keenair Services Ltd which operated twin-engined aircraft on air taxi and charter work effectively ceased operations in 1983 with the sale of the remaining Aztec twin. As covered under LFS, although a Seneca twin was operated for flying training purposes 1990-92, it was not available for charter.

However, under the management of Martin Keen, the family business desired to expand into the field of Air Charter work again. To do so a new company was formed, Keenair Charter Ltd. Their first twin to be acquired, an Aztec 250 G-BFEK arrived in June 1994 and after maintenance first flew as G-TOMK in November. In the summer of 1995 Keenair Charter received its all-important Air Operator's Certificate (AOC), to enable the company to undertake air-taxi work, initially with Aztecs. The company was soon allocated the 3-letter ICAO code 'KEE', first use of Keenair flight number being when G-TOMK operated as 'KEE 02' from Liverpool to Dublin on 5th June 1995. However the company applied to change the designator, the new one 'JFK' first used when G-TOMK operated to and from Nantes in November 1995. A second Aztec EI-BOO had arrived in April 1995 and after extensive work first flew as G-JANK January 1996, entering service in March, just in time to replace G-TOMK as it was leased out and departed to Bourne-mouth. Indeed G-TOMK was never to return to Liverpool, the lease to SFT Aviation was extended, then eventually purchased by them and re-registered G-VSFT December 1998. Aztec G-JANK went onto serve for several years from Liverpool on charter flights and training. An undercarriage problem in late February 1999 kept the aircraft grounded until early October, G-JANK eventually leaving the fleet in early July 2000, with the majority of charter work now calling for use of the larger turboprop aircraft.

While the Aztecs were good aircraft, they were too small for Martin Keen's ambitions. At the end of November 1995 a Trislander G-BCCU arrived on lease, enabling the company to step up into serious ad hoc passenger and freight charter work. The first revenue earning flight operated on 10th January 1996 transporting newsprint from Liverpool to Dublin, with call-sign JFK01. A second Trislander, G-BEDP, arrived early September 1996. During this first year, much of the work was in transporting newspapers to Dublin at night, augmenting the regular

Emerald flights. During both September and October, 24 Dublin flights were operated by Keenair. Towards the end of the year while G-BCCU returned to Culmbernauld for maintenance, G-AZLJ arrived in November to become the regular second aircraft; replacing G-BEDP which departed in December on the return of G-BCCU. As the Trislanders were operated from the south airfield, portacabin accommodation was rented near the terminal, although the flying school operation remained on the north airfield. For much of 1997 the two Trislanders were employed transporting newspapers across the Irish Sea when required. Despite widely advertising the availability of the aircraft, disappointingly little other work could be found for the slow and noisy Trislanders. As a result the company in February 1997 looked into acquiring a Shorts 3-30, although it was the end of the year before the company moved up to turbine powered equipment.

Turbo-Props Acquired

A bold step was marked by the arrival at 16:18 on Thursday 27th November 1997 of EMB-110 Bandeirante G-BGYT already fully painted with cabin titles and Keenair's 'winged star' logo on the tail. For much of 1998 the fleet consisted of the 2 Trislanders, the Bandeirante and an Aztec, although one aircraft would be away for maintenance at times. Main business was the transportation of newspapers at night to Dublin or Belfast. Slowly though the availability of the turbine 18-seater became better known. As a result 1999 was a much busier year, although it started with the return of Trislander G-BCCU to Culmbernauld on 7th January, while sole Liverpool based Aztec, G-JANK spent much of the year in the hangar after a problem in late February. The Bandeirante was used on 6th March for a 45 minute local flight as 'JFK001' as part of a 'Fear of Flying' course. In May and June it was used by British Aerospace on inter-factory shuttle flights, mostly out of Hawarden. BAe would use Keenair's Bandeirantes off and on over the next few years to substitute when their own Jetstream aircraft were unavailable. During July 1999 it visited Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Cambridge, Bristol and Blackpool in addition to BAe shuttle ops from Chester. The visit to Cambridge was to operate a substitute flight for Suckling Airways; to Bristol to operate a JEA service and Blackpool to operate for Comed Aviation. As a small company Keenair could respond quickly to an immediate requirement, so substitute flights for established carriers provided a good, if unpredictable, source of income. Meanwhile the remaining Trislander G-AZLJ was employed mostly on occasional night newspaper flights. Such was the demand for the Bandeirante that a second example, G-FLTY was leased-in. This aircraft operating a BAe shuttle en route to arrival at Liverpool Airport, 18th August. Both Bandeirantes were purchased in November, rather than leased-in. The final Trislander having been returned to Culmbernauld on 2nd August. October proved an exceptionally busy month, with 'YT' operating out of Leeds for Gill Airways for a day and both aircraft substituting for BAC Express on a mail flight being notable. In November notable operations saw 'YT' spending three days with Gill Airways out of Leeds, a day with Suckling and a day with JEA out of Belfast City, while 'TY' operated with JEA a day each out of both Belfast Aldergrove and Belfast City. 'YT' operated a medical flight to and from Heathrow, while in December 'TY' operated a transplant flight Liverpool-Glasgow-Heathrow-Liverpool.

New Century, New Opportunities, Launch of Scheduled Services!

Early in 2000 Keenair went 'on-line' with their own website www.keenair.co.uk (in more recent times www.keenair.com), covering charter and flying training business, one of the first Liverpool GA organisations to do so. The year 2000 started off with a nightly operation for Emerald Airways and Securicor flying five times weekly to Belfast from 14th January until 19th May, this being in addition to their regular JFK290 newspaper flight operation.

In April 2000, Keenair announced that they were to become a scheduled service airline, with regular flights connecting Liverpool and Cork. The service operated on a Friday leaving Liverpool at 1100 and Cork at 1330, with sector times of an hour and a half. On Sundays leaving Liverpool 1800, and Cork at 2000. Fares were fixed at £99 single, £129 return. The flights commenced on Friday 26th May 2000, with the inaugural flight departing Liverpool at 1124, operated by G-BGYT. In addition to the regular night work to Dublin and Belfast, and scheduled service to Cork, Keenair's aircraft were seen at Cardiff, Brize Norton, Manchester, Coventry, Bristol, Humberside, Trollhattan, Le Touquet, Eindhoven, Rennes, Hevelgem, Dortmund and Stuttgart during July alone. In August the company announced



will commence a new air service between
Liverpool - Cork - Liverpool.

Prices start from **£ (GBP) 129-00 return**
with a one way fare of **£ (GBP) 99-00**

The aircraft type will be one of our two
18 seat Embraer Bandeirante's.

The start date will be **26th May 2000** and will be
operated currently on **Friday's and Sunday's.**

Timings are as follows:

Friday
Liverpool 1100 - Cork 1230
Cork 1300 - Liverpool 1430

Sunday
Liverpool 1800 - Cork 1930
Cork 2000 - Liverpool 2130

For more information please contact:
Keenair Booking Office on 0151-448-0606

that it was investigating a Short SD.3-60 for freight and passenger work to provide flexibility alongside a single Bandeirante. During September the Bandeirante aircraft were to be seen at Southend, Luton, Bristol, Belfast, Sheffield City, Saarbrücken, Kerry, Nuremberg, Dublin, Nantes, Malmö/Stirrup, Dresden and Cork on the scheduled service. Additionally an aircraft operated for a day out of Blackpool for Comed Aviation, and a East Midlands-Dublin freight flight for Air Carvel.

An expansion of the Cork schedule was announced, with a further rotation on Mondays, leaving Liverpool at 0700 and Cork at 0900, to commence on 8th January 2001. In the event this additional flight never operated, the service running at twice weekly frequency throughout 2001. January found the aircraft operating BAe inter factory shuttle from Warton; for Comed out of Blackpool; additional flights for Emerald Airways; Dublin newspapers and additional mail flights. Providing extra capacity on mail flights became regular work, with 8 Exeter rotations in February and 9 Gatwick rotations in each of March and April. Passenger charters from Liverpool were rare. The Cup Final in Cardiff on 12th May saw not only both Bandeirantes employed on day-trip charters, but also the destination for LFS Cherokee G-LFSG!

However, during the summer months the 'bread-and-butter' regular work on newspapers, mail and for Emerald Airways decreased and was showing signs that this work was unlikely to recover to previously busy levels. Meanwhile it would be developments at Blackpool that held the most promise for regular work. Comed Aviation with their scheduled service from Blackpool to the Isle of Man and Belfast ceased trading during February 2001, they were replaced by Platinum Airways with Jetstream 31s. During the autumn, Platinum sub-contracted to Krystel Airlines and Pool Aviation, (who used a King Air 200). In mid-November, Platinum Airways in turn collapsed. With effect from 22nd November, Keenair Charter stepped in to provide a twice daily service on weekdays, routing BLK-IOM-BHD-IOM-BLK, with fares of £85 single and return from £154. During December most visits by their Bandeirante aircraft to Liverpool were positioning flights to operate the Cork schedule.

On 4th February it was announced that a consortium of Keenair, Helicentre and Peter Whitehead (a Blackpool FC Director) would come together to form 'FlyKeen' and operate the Blackpool to Isle of Man sector, with the intention of extending to Belfast at a later date. From June 2002 FlyKeen would use Skydrift's Bandeirante G-TABS to cover for maintenance on either of their aircraft.

Meanwhile back at Liverpool, Martin Keen was in discussions with interested parties who were looking to set up a thrice daily Liverpool to London City connection using leased-in Fokker 50

aircraft, with a proposed start date of September 2002. These plans never materialised. However, a fresh opportunity presented itself when BA Cityexpress declared a desire to withdraw from their former Manx Airlines route between Liverpool and Isle of Man. Keenair applied to the CAA and were awarded the route licence, so in late September '02 announced to the Press a 3 times daily Monday to Friday, Liverpool John Lennon to Isle of Man air link using Bandeirante aircraft, with a start set for 7th October. Flights would leave Liverpool at 0900, 1545 & 1900 and leave the Isle of Man at 0800, 1030 & 1700, with fares from £129 return. The inaugural service on Monday 7th October used G-FLTY. During October the service ran twice daily, with a total of 302 passengers. For three weeks in November, 3 return flights operated Monday to Friday. However G-BGYT operated the last flight, the evening rotation on Monday 25th November by which time 602 passengers had been carried during November. Most flights were operated by G-BGYT or G-FLTY, with only a couple by G-TABS. Although business was building nicely, BA Cityexpress had not withdrawn from the route as they indicated they would, and on 18th November Euromanx had announced a start date of 2nd December on the route. Rightly fearing a three-way fare war, Keenair bowed out before losses mounted.

Meanwhile the Cork service had been withdrawn. Although a few flights in September and October were cancelled, the final service on the route took place over the weekend of Friday 11th with G-FLTY and Sunday 13th October 2002 with G-BGYT in use. While there was a stated intention to operate again summer 2003, the service did not return until Jet Magic between September 2003 and January 2004 and later Ryanair from April 2005.

Final A.O.C. Operations

During these ventures at Liverpool, the Bandeirantes continued to operate from Blackpool to the Isle of Man, the service being extended to Belfast by March 2003. G-BGYT was painted in 'FlyKeen' titles May 2003, and the operation assigned a new 2-letter IATA 'ticketing' code of '5Q' in August. Visits to Liverpool were infrequent. In September only G-FLTY was noted operating from LJLA. A charter as JFK500 operated to Southampton on 1st, returning on 3rd. Overnight 4/5th a double run night mail flight to Belfast substituting for BAC Express, with another mail flight early on 6th as JFK757 with mail to Bristol. On 10th to and from Hahn as JFK420, with a load inbound of car parts. Finally, on 29th to and from Newcastle as JFK383 to operate a charter from Newcastle. These were the last Keenair Charter Ltd revenue earning flights from Liverpool. On 19th September, a change of ownership for both aircraft was recorded with the C.A.A., with the new owner registered as Keen Airways Ltd of Blackpool, somewhat confusingly managed by a Mr Kean, formerly with Woodgate Aviation. Although both G-BGYT and G-FLTY visited Liverpool during October they were positioning flights only. Finally, Keenair Charter Ltd was placed into administration and receiver appointed 22nd October 2003. Although Keenair Charter Ltd had ceased trading, the Liverpool Flying School Ltd and Keenair Ltd's maintenance operations at Liverpool were totally separate companies and so, fortunately, were unaffected.

For the record, FlyKeen terminated flights between Blackpool, Isle of Man and Belfast around July 2005 with the routes passed onto a new airline, A2B Airways who intended to use ATR-42 aircraft, but actually operated a Shorts 360. The former Keenair Charter Bandeirante G-FLTY had been sold to Skydrift in March 2004, while G-BGYT suffered an engine fire at the Isle of Man summer 2005 and was effectively abandoned, but is now exhibited by the Manx Aviation Museum.

JIM & MARTIN KEENS' 'REAL' AEROPLANES

Certainly the aspect of the Keens' involvement in aviation that has provided the most interest is their love of 'real' aeroplanes. Over the years this section of the Keen story has encompassed a wide range of types, Tiger Moths, Dragon Rapide, Stearmans, Texan, Cubs, L.5 Sentinel, Stampses, Chipmunks, Nord 3202s, Broussard, Kraguj and Fairchild Argus aircraft, indeed right up to and including a Dakota!

Tiger Moths, Stampses & Stearmans

As already hinted at in the coverage of the early years of LFS, Jim Keen and Umberto Marchesi imported 4 Tiger Moths and a Stampe during December 1965, that had been used as 'extras' in the filming of the 'Blue Max' at Weston and other locations in the Republic of Ireland. All 5 bi-planes flew into Speke on 10th December 1965 from Dublin via Squires Gate. However, it



Above—Boeing A75N1 Stearman G-BAVO / 26 *Brian Jones*
Below—T-6G Texan N2807G, which became G-BHTH retained its US Navy scheme, with white 'registration' 2807, coded 103/V of VF-111 Squadron. *Brian Jones*



would be some time before any of the five aircraft flew again, as they all needed extensive inspection and overhaul work. All the Tiger Moths were registered to Mr U. Marchesi, first to re-fly was G-AIRK on 29th November 1966, the second, G-ANCK, re-flew on 4th March 1967. Both G-AIRK and G-AMTK departed by road. Although G-AIRK did not remain long at Liverpool before sale to a new owner, G-ANCK was sold locally to Mr J. Beglan and was for around two years flown by Jim Keen and available for use by suitably qualified members of LAC. Jim Keen had been looking for an aircraft with aerobatic capabilities. The Stampe SV-4c which had arrived as F-BNMC, was registered to LAC as G-ATIR, however it's rebuild to British C of A standards became protracted, it not flying in UK marks until October 1969. It flew regularly with LAC, providing aerobatic training during 1970 and 1971, until the C.A.A. placed a limitation on the type's operation.

The operation of Liverpool Aero Engineering's Dragon Rapide G-AEML between December 1967 and November 1969 has been covered earlier in the early days of Keenair Air Services.

The import of two Stearman bi-planes in early 1973 from Israel created a great deal of interest and established Jim Keen as an importer of "classic" aeroplanes. Retaining their Israeli identities, they were flown across Europe on delivery during



Keenair's Boeing Stearman N2S-3 Kaydet G-BHUW *Brian Jones*

March 1973. After inspection they were placed on the UK register as G-BAVN and G-BAVO. 'Victor November' being re-flown just days before performing at the May 1973 Liverpool Air Show, with 'Victor Oscar' following it into the air during early August. Between summer '73 and mid '79 G-BAVN operated in a white overall scheme with red trim, for the later part of this period in the ownership of Mr R.T.A. Smith it flew rarely. In mid '79 it was resprayed into the classic blue and yellow US Navy training colours, and soon after was sold and departed from Liverpool. G-BAVO was flown from summer '73 until mid '81 in an overall blue scheme (similar to that once worn by Tiger Moth G-ANKK), with white registration and winged 'KAS' crest on the fin. For a period between October '77 and August '80 the aircraft was owned by Anthony Hodgson, however remained Liverpool based. The ownership was transferred back to Jim Keen and Keenair summer '80. During the following summer 'Victor Oscar' was resprayed in the blue and yellow 'classic' markings of the USAAC, as side code '26'. Stored for a year from spring '83, it then became widely seen around local air events, flying a spirited routine in the hands of Jim or Martin Keen, for example at the Liverpool Airport Air Displays June '82 and August '84; Mersey River Festival Air Displays in July '84, June '86, June '87 and June '88 and at the Jurby Air Show, IoM, August '86. In summer '87 it was again purchased by Anthony Hodgson and was moved to his North Wales strip, although it appeared back at Liverpool for maintenance until mid 1989.

Two years after the initial purchase of Stearmans', a third was acquired, this one in the U.S.A. It arrived in a crate via the docks, being assembled and flown as G-BDCF in June '75, already painted in a delightful blue and yellow USAAC training colours scheme, but with large UK registration on the fuselage sides. For a time this was Jim Keen's main aerobatic aircraft, until at Barton on 17th July 1977, during an air display routine in thundery weather, the aircraft failed to recover in time from a spin and impacted the ground just outside the airfield boundary. The aircraft was a write-off, and although the two occupants were somewhat shaken, they were uninjured. The remains of the aircraft were brought back to Liverpool for spares recovery, and remained in hangar No.4 for at least ten years after.

Before this accident the fleet of Stearman aircraft at Liverpool had risen to four. This additional aircraft, G-AZLE, arrived from Booker in June 1976 and was operated by Mr Talbot-Smith, although in fact it rarely flew, being sold August 1978. A rare public outing was a display at the July '78 Liverpool Airport Air Show. In the mid '70s, such was Mr. Keen's domination of the type in the U.K., that one national aviation publication declared Keenair to be the "sole importer and official agent" for the type in the U.K.!

In May 1980 a further Stearman, N474, arrived at hangar 4, in a shipping container from the U.S.A. This aircraft became G-BHUW and flew in an attractive orange and white 'sunburst' scheme between August '80 and its departure on sale in February 1981.

After a gap of several years without a Stearman in hangar No.4, mention (although out of sequence) needs to be made of G-BRUJ. This aircraft was brought to Speke from Staverton and a stalled rebuild during April 1993. Following an extensive rebuild, first flight in the UK was performed at Liverpool 23rd December 1994. Never a Keen family-owned Stearman, it was owned by Mitch Walker for around 10 years, then from late 2004 by Rohan Hughes. It is currently in a USN scheme, marked '205' and remains in the loving care of Keenair in the new No.4 hangar.

This has taken us well ahead of a chronological sequence, so back now to the late 'Seventies.

Starduster and Texan

With the eye for the unusual, an American homebuilt, a Starduster Too N800RE was purchased in the U.S.A. by Mr. Keen and arrived in a shipping container via the docks during July 1978. As G-KEEN it



The first, Nord 3202, N2256K, flew little and was stored at Caernarfon for nearly two years. Here seen in 1987 outside hangar No.4 as G-BIZM while active from Liverpool. *Brian Jones*

made its first flight in the U.K. during October '78 and was flown frequently until part-exchanged with Anthony Hodgson during summer 1980. The Starduster Too continued to fly from Liverpool, although it flew less often, until leaving for storage at Caernarfon during May '82 and eventual sale a few months later.

The same purchasing mission to the U.S.A. that brought Stearman G-BHUW to the U.K. also acquired a very fine T-6G Texan N2807G, which became G-BHTH. It arrived during April 1980 in a shipping container. On assembly it was already painted in an attractive dark blue US Navy scheme, with white 'registration' 2807, coded 103/V of VF-111 Squadron, which was retained. First UK flight was on 1st August 1980. An expensive aeroplane to operate, it did not fly frequently, indeed did not fly at all during 1982. It was impressively flown at local air displays though, for example at Liverpool Airport Air Displays June 1981 and August 1984, and over the River Festival June 1983 and July 1984. In March 1986 it left Liverpool for a new owner at Wellesbourne Mountford.

Not all Jim Keen's imports came from the U.S.A. A Piper Cub 95 was acquired August 1981, arriving as F-BOUM. After overhaul it emerged re-sprayed in USAAF olive green, coded '33-K' in yellow and now registered as G-BJLH flew again May 1982. Quickly sold, it departed to Biggin Hill in September.

The purchases in the U.S.A. during 1980 were aided by Mr. Keen becoming a full Colonel in the Confederate Air Force. As Col. Jim Keen, he became instrumental in setting up the 'Eagle Squadron' of the C.A.F. in the U.K. during 1984, and Liverpool became the Headquarters of the northern 'Falcon Squadron', with a sign to that effect, erected during July that year outside the Keenair offices, alongside hangar No.4.



The largest aircraft to be acquired by Keenair arrived in October 1982 in the form of Douglas C-47A N54607 seen here in early 1987 after repaint. *Brian Jones*



Another unusual aircraft owned was this Soko Kraguj G-SOKO/30149 a ground attack aircraft seen here still resplendent in its Yugoslav Air Force colours.
Brian Thompson

The Nord 3202 Saga

A further batch of aircraft arrived by sea from Miami, U.S.A. in May 1981, in the form of four former French, 1956 built, Nord 3202, two-seat training aircraft. One was quickly assembled and was outside engine-running by September '81. It was not until April 1983 that it was first flown in the U.K., by which time another had been assembled. The first, N2256K flew little, indeed was stored at Caernarfon April '84 to February '86, later emerging from hangar No.4 as G-BIZM in a red striped scheme to fly again February 1987. Sold to a new owner in Humberside in the autumn it departed Liverpool that December, although was back at Liverpool for annual checks for a number of years. Meanwhile the second to be assembled, now G-BIZK was repainted in a Luftwaffe style period scheme March 1988 and flew in mid December, only seven and a half years after arrival! It departed in January to Anthony Hodgson's Bryngwyn Bach airstrip, and sold again in Norfolk autumn '90. The third to be assembled was the prospective G-BIZL, noted complete August 1988. However on sale to Anthony Hodgson it was taken by road to Bryngwyn Bach during late 1989. Now re-registered G-BRVA it returned to Liverpool by road May 1990, registered to Geoff Martlew, Keenair's chief engineer. Repainted in French military yellow with red wing tips and serial No.85 during February '90, and now owned by LFS, it first flew in the U.K. mid September 1991, before sale in York, departing June 1992. Meanwhile the final machine, the prospective G-BIZJ was never assembled at Liverpool, departing by road July 1988 for Northumberland and subsequently flew as G-BPMU.

D-Day Dakota

The largest aircraft to be acquired by Keenair arrived in October 1982 from storage at Blackbushe in the form of Douglas C-47A N54607, formerly of the Moroccan Air Force. This was discovered to be a genuine 'Warbird', having almost certainly taken part in the D-Day Normandy landings when flown by the USAAF. Although flown into Liverpool, a great deal of work was required on this aircraft to bring it back to full airworthiness. In the month following arrival, much paint-work was stripped then the outer wings were removed and the aircraft positioned at



The rare Stinson L-5c Sentinel, (Right) N5035H wears an attractive 'tones of blue' 'Marines' scheme. Behind is Stearman G-BAVO/26. (Jurby display August '86)
Brian Jones

the back of No.4 hangar for long-term restoration work over the following years. In mid June 1986, the aircraft was rolled out, and over the following months re-assembled and detail markings, including 'Invasion Stripes' and "Maggie May" nose art added to the basic coat of USAAF transport olive green topsides and grey underside scheme. Without doubt the restoration of this aircraft presented Keenair with its most ambitious, costliest and greatest challenge. The engines were run again February 1987. It was entered in an historic aircraft auction July '87, but with the highest bid at only £15K, remained unsold. A purchaser was found January 1989, the aircraft departing Liverpool on a ferry flight to Coventry early July 1989, with the registration G-BPMP. It was anticipated that with Cherkley Aviation the Dakota would join the air display circuit around Europe, However, all the sweat and tears of the Keen family and Keenair engineers ultimately counted for little, the aircraft being grounded at Coventry, sold on to Air Atlantique December 1992 and then broken-up April 1995, the cockpit section being saved, and now on display at the Luchtvaart Hobby Shop, Aalsmeerderbrug near Schiphol.

Further Aircraft of Character

The acquisition and operation of 'Warbirds' of character, such as the Stearman and Texan attracted a great deal of interest from other pilots, but the cost of operating such aircraft deterred many from being able to fly them. A group led by Jim Keen, known as Keenair Warbirds West, in early 1986 purchased a Stinson L-5c Sentinel, N5035H in the U.S.A. and imported it to Liverpool. Painted in attractive tones of blue 'Marines' scheme of the Pacific War Theatre it is a genuine Warbird type. The Stinson is rare in Europe, and with plenty of power was both interesting to fly yet reasonably economical to operate. During summers '86 and '87 it flew regularly and appeared alongside the Stearman at air displays such as the Mersey River Festival, Wirral Show and Jurby Air Show. Unlike the Stearman and Texan it was not allied to the C.A.F.. Following the death of Jim Keen, the aircraft was put up for sale, now registered G-BNUM. It was delivered to a new owner in Germany November 1987 and became D-EONH.

In replacement, a Max Holste Broussard G-BKPU/217 was acquired, arriving from Thruxton July 1987. This 50s utility aircraft, still in French Army green scheme, was a distinctive aircraft with its twin tails and slow speed. It was demonstrated at the Mersey River Festival 4th June 1988. However, just 3 days later, on 7th June 1988 while on approach to Barton Aerodrome, an oil seal failed and in the following forced landing on the M62 two occupants of a car were seriously injured, although the two pilots in the Broussard, Geoff Martlew and Martin Keen escaped serious injury.

Martin Keen certainly followed in father's footsteps with an eye to owning unusual historic aeroplanes, as in early November 1990, former RAF, 1944 constructed, Fairchild 24R Argus G-AJPI arrived from White Waltham. The aircraft was severely damaged at Liverpool, inbound from Mona, on 16th May 1992 when an undercarriage strut failed on landing. Fortunately parts were acquired or manufactured and the aircraft repaired, re-flying November 1993. It did not fly that regularly afterwards, being sold February 1995 and departed to Norwich.

The final unusual aircraft worthy of mention here is the Soko Kraguj, an unusual single seat ground attack aircraft, still



PA-18 Super Cub 150—G-TUGG was leased by Keenair between June 1984 and February 1987. It then departed for Northern Ireland and the Ulster Gliding Club.
Brian Jones



DH82A Tiger Moth—G-AMCK with Martin Keen at the controls overflies Aintree at the start of the Cody commemorative flight in 2009—This picture perhaps sums up neatly the Keen contribution to flying on Merseyside since 1963—a sense of heritage, fine engineering, historic aircraft and a love of flying pure and simple.
Liverpool Daily Post & Echo

resplendent in Yugoslav Air Force colours. G-BRXK/30149, first arrived February 1991 for extended maintenance, returning home to Yorkshire June 1992. However it was back at Liverpool December 1993, shortly after it became G-SOKO in January 1994 for a Liverpool based owner; hangared and maintained with Keenair. Rare public outings took it to display at Church Fenton and Manston during July 1994 and at the RAFA Woodford Air Show in 1995. Later it was purchased by Martin Keen, Autumn 1999, although became a 'hangar queen' while up for sale. Eventually sold, March 2002 and departed for Bournemouth.

Further Historic Aircraft

During 1992 an opportunity arose with the sale of the aircraft operated by the HSA Sports and Social Club over at Hawarden. First to appear at Liverpool was Chipmunk G-BBRV, which arrived during June 1993 and was soon in regular use with LFS fleet. It operated at Liverpool for a number of years, until sale in August 1997 and delivery to Biggin Hill. Meanwhile the other Chipmunk, G-BARS arrived in late October 1993, but was quickly sold, delivered to Kirkbymoorside in early December. The third of the Chester trio, Tiger Moth G-ANTE arrived a few years later, in January 1997. After an extensive overhaul it was rolled out in RAF markings as T6562 and reflowed during April 1999. She departed in December 1999 for Sywell having been sold. A few months after the Tiger Moth departed from Liverpool, one of the Chipmunks returned. G-BBRV came back to Liverpool in July 2000. Following an overhaul it reflowed 15th June 2001 in RAF markings as WD347, impressively painted in grey and day-glo with CFS 'Skylarks' team colours. It operated from Liverpool with the Flying School, until sold and departed to Sheffield City Airport late October 2003.

Following a series of British built aircraft, next was a Piper J-3c-90 Cub G-AXGP which arrived in March 2002 and was at Liverpool until sale and departure to Meppershall in May 2006. Its place was taken by another Cub a L-18c version G-AYPR. The aircraft was no stranger to Hangar No.4 having been maintained by Keenair engineers for its former owner for several years. However work on the aircraft took until February 2007 to complete, it emerging as G-LCUB. A superb looking aircraft, it was not long before it was sold and left on 1st June for new owners, The Tiger Club.

Most recent acquisition is the fabulous green Tiger Moth G-AMCK. Unlike previous historic types, the Tiger Moth earns its keep, providing air experience bi-plane flights for the general public. These flights take place from Liverpool Airport, but more often from Barton through the summer months. This Tiger Moth is somewhat unusual in that while in America, some years ago, it had a tail wheel and brakes fitted – a modification that the CAA will not permit British operators to make. During summer 2010 rather fittingly, it was given the name "The Liver Moth".

Interesting Aircraft with Links to Keenair

Over the years, in addition to the Keen Family's own historic aircraft, a number of privately owned interesting Liverpool based aircraft have been maintained, hangared and some made available to appropriately qualified LFS members to fly. Types include a Jet Provost, C-47A Dakota, Harvard, Aeronca, Stearman, Stampe and Chipmunk. Most of these are listed in one of the appendices following. This is in addition to a number of Stearman, Stampe, Kraguj, Nord 3202, Cubs and a Starduster Too that have had local owners in addition to belonging to the Keen family or companies at some stage.

Individual Histories and Registrations

Some individual Keenair aircraft histories will be in subsequent issues of 09/27. They can also be found shortly on the NWAN forum together with a complete registration listing of all the aircraft.

A young Jim (Striped blazer) sits ready for his first flight on the opening day of Liverpool Airport 1 July 1933—who could have imagined the impact on that Airport he would later have.
Thelwell Collection

For even more information about the history and operations of Keenair and the Liverpool Flying School together with loads more photographs and a comprehensive listing of all the aircraft owned, operated or associated with Keenair, please see the NWAN forum site—

<http://derbosoft.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=history>

Brian Jones

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