



Chris Collis' North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco cuts an unusual shape into the skies above Llandudno.

An Energetic Return to the Slopes!

Phil Cooke and Al Gorham report from the first slope event of the year hosted by the UK's Power Scale Soaring Association — 21st/22nd May 2021



Phil Cooke [Follow](#)

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It is very clear the spirit of the PSSA community has not been eroded one bit by the COVID lockdown. The lengthy enforced grounding we all had to endure due to travel restrictions in the UK meant this was an eagerly awaited meet, and despite a mixed weather forecast it played out to be a well-attended opener at the start of our delayed 2021 flying season.

Day 1 — Saturday

30+ pilots gathered at the top of the Great Orme, Llandudno, North Wales on Saturday morning for the event brief at 10am — covering not only the handful of rules we employ to enable safe, continuous operation of PSS models at a public site, but also the ongoing Covid governance details as well as the newly required CAA registration checks and Article 16 compliance requirements. Although social distancing is easy to self-manage in such a big, open space we agreed to apply further mitigation with limits in the pits of two models being rigged by each pilot at any one time and similarly we limited the number of pilots in the active flying box to six.

Saturday provided good strength (15–25mph) northwest winds which saw us flying from the lower ‘Café slope’ ledge — a great lifting cliff face with a steep drop to the Irish Sea but one with limitations due to the shape and size of the landing zone — not best suited for maiden flights or approaches with the bigger or less manoeuvrable PSS models. Flying commenced immediately after the brief and continued impressively right up until sundown on the Saturday, pilots wanting to extract every last minute of opportunity in the ideal conditions, knowing that Sundays weather was forecast to be quite different!

One ‘silver lining’ evident with the enforced break from flying activity was the number of newly completed models on show and in action throughout the weekend. New models of all types across a wide range of scales — the levels of ingenuity and fidelity in the quest for scale realism is always inspiring and something which this group of modellers clearly continues to thrive upon!

Models on Show

I’ll start with the North American F-86 Sabre, the model type and short-kit selected back in 2019 as the subject of the PSSA’s 2020 Mass Build, an event still not run (delayed due to COVID) and currently deferred until September 2021. More and more models are now reaching the point of completion, and there were at least half a dozen examples of the type brought to this event — although only Martin Gay and Peter Garsden were seen flying their Sabres on the Saturday. I’d not seen Peter’s model fly before, it’s modified from the all built up plan with the utilisation of a lost foam fibreglass fuselage which saw Pete complete and test fly his model much sooner than the rest of the group building the lite-ply and balsa planked fuselage.



Photo 2: Bob Jennings provides the launch for Peter Garsden's new F-86 Sabre built from the G&M models kit.

Pete's F-86 is finished in the flamboyant scheme from the 4th Aerobrigata Italian Airforce aerobatic team 'Cavallino Rampante' circa 1956 who flew five Sabres in close formation. With an AUW of 4.5lbs it flew brilliantly early in the day showing great pace and agility cruising up and down the slope. Later in the afternoon Martin flew his now well proven, all silver prototype airframe to equally good effect, before a group of Sabres were gathered as one for the camera with builders swapping notes and learnings from this latest group pursuit.

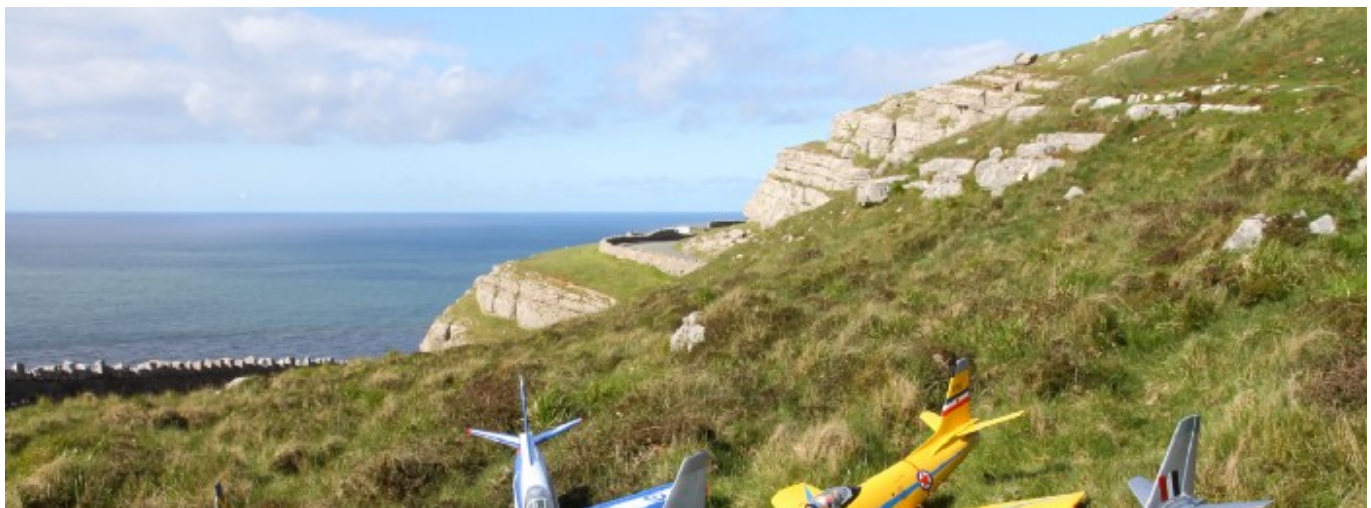




Photo 3: A taste of things to come — PSSA Mass Build F-86 Sabres begin to dominate the slope!

As well as the wide range of schemes already clearly evident, I was particularly taken by the modified two-seater TF-86 prototype (built by Martin and Gordon Studley) with its longer nose and huge double canopy! A very rare machine indeed! We eagerly await the Mass Build event in September where we hope to amass many more Sabres together upon the Great Orme.

Andy Meade had completed his new Gloster Meteor Mk3 just in time for the event which was sat rigged in the pits and looking superb bathed in the Welsh sunlight. This is an impressive airframe — at 1/7th scale, conventionally built up from Andy's own drawings it spans 69" and has an AUW just over 10lb. I was very keen to photograph the model in the good light during the Saturday morning session.





Photo 4: PSSA member Andy Meade lends some scale to his fantastic new Gloster Meteor.

It's fitted with working flaps and a complex rudder, split either side of the mid-mounted tailplane just like the fullsize. This stunning new model was wisely not test flown on the unforgiving NW Café slope we were operating from — Andy awaiting the opportunity to fly from the South West slope later in the weekend! The model is finished in 25g/m² glass cloth and resin and painted with acrylics with decals from Callie Graphics. Andy explained that the plans will soon be available for purchase through the PSSA website (see *Resources* section at the end of this article).

Chris Collis was flying with us once again and like last time we met at the Lley in 2020, he'd brought with him his pair of huge Avro Lancasters — each spanning 134" and with an AUW of 25lb. These would both be aired later in the day but prior to that Chris also campaigned a brand new O/D model in the characteristic shape of the North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco.



Photo 5: The OV-10 Bronco on finals into land at the end of its successful maiden flight

Fully built up and with a span of 60" this rugged shaped model enjoyed a successful maiden flight and looked great in the sun with its USMC three-tone desert camouflage.

PSS encompasses all types of aircraft, some more naturally suited to slope use than others, so considering their clean, sleek lines I've always thought it odd we don't see more business aviation jets flown from the slope. Dave Gilder has improved that situation with his latest build in the shape of the Cessna Citation Bravo. This large-scale model has been converted to PSS from the Hero Eagle EDF power kit and Dave has repainted the model to represent the aircraft flown in Switzerland by the TCS Air Ambulance Service.



Photo 6: Cessna Citation Bravo built and converted to PSS by Dave Gilder

It spans an impressive 71" and has an AUW of 8.75lbs, the large fuselage and engine pods are all formed in fibreglass and it has a fully built up wing and tailplanes. As yet unflown, Dave did rig the model at the event for the camera and I think it holds huge potential as a great, rugged performer from the slope!

Formation Flights

Although there are no formal timed display slots at our 'Fly for Fun' PSS meetings it's quite common for similar aircraft types to be flown together when the opportunity arises and this meeting was no exception with two separate performances being worthy of note.



Photo 7: Tim Mackey's Airbus A380 gets away as the second of three flown together

Prior to lunch, Tim Mackey and Steve Kemp both flew their Airbus A380 models built for PSS from the Windrider EDF kit. These 72" span, all foam models are well proven from the slope and have been flown together before to great effect, their size and stability lending themselves really well to a series of gentle formation passes. Tim's model is finished in the legacy Airbus Industrie house colours and Steve has finished his model in a recent Emirates livery. Building upon this spectacle, Dave Gilder also launched his Airbus A380 built for PSS from the slightly smaller Hobbyking EDF kit and recently refurbished in the latest QANTAS livery.



Photo 8: Airbus formation flight (left to right) Tim Mackey, Steve Kemp & David Gilder.

These three similar models went on to hold the spectators attention for 20 minutes or so with a series of formation and tail chase passes which looked superb against the clear skies we were blessed with. The end of this impressive flight was signalled with a series of three controlled circuits and descents into the tight landing zone, characterised by the underslung engine pods ‘knocking off’ by design as each of the aircraft slid to a stop in the short grass!

Later in the afternoon Chris Collis enlisted the help of Andy Meade and myself to fly his large Avro Lancasters together as a pair. Andy and I familiarised ourselves with the models transmitter set up before helping see both airframes moved over from the car park to the launch area. Prior to the flight we agreed a plan to fly from the current site but to land these large, heavy models higher up on the upper South West slope which has a much more generous landing zone — however to get there we would have to walk and climb to the upper shelf whilst the models were kept safely in flight out over the North West slope. With that part of the flight plan agreed we committed to launch.

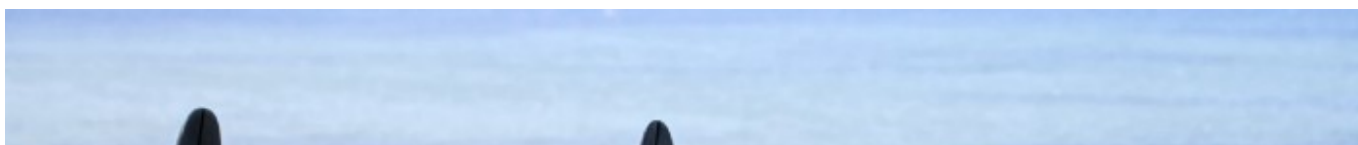




Photo 9: Final checks before the second large Lancaster is launched out to sea.

At 25lb AUW each model required its own paired launch crew but once safely away the two models were quickly trimmed out and united in safe formation cruising up and down the slope and looking very realistic indeed! Out to the left hand side of each circuit the late afternoon sun was playing beautifully against the aircrafts' satin finish and the models looked superb making that slow right hand turn back towards us out over the sea.



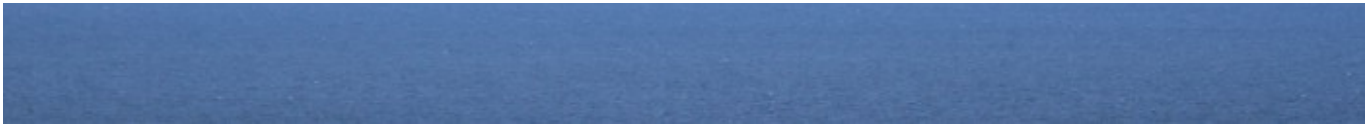


Photo 10: Lancaster duo, Chris Collis owned models flown here by Andy Meade and Phil Cooke.

Andy and I enjoyed a 20 minute flight consisting of a number of gentle formation passes very characteristic of the full size Lancaster. Both models proved nicely controllable particularly with a few degrees of flap added to regulate the speed and with coordinated aileron and rudder turns — I think we both thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to fly these impressive models together for Chris and all who were stood watching. Although we were still revelling flying up and down the Café slope close in to the cliff face the time had come to enact our landing plan and both models were allowed to push out and climb to height a little before we set off on our hike to the chosen landing zone.





Photo 11: Low level bombing run.

With a small party of guides (including Chris) we made our way safely across the Great Orme's perimeter road and then steadily up the steep face of the main NW slope behind us, all the time keeping the two identical looking Lancasters flying out over the North West slope. After a 10 minute climb we found ourselves back on top of the South West slope with the vast open area now exclusively available to us — into which we could circuit and bring the Lancasters safely in to rest. I must admit I was very relieved to be able to keep the model I was flying above the changing horizon as we climbed to the higher landing zone, and once we'd regained our breath from the climb Andy and I readied ourselves for the consecutive landings. Both models were brought home safely, one of the models touching down in some of the longer heather which resulted in a little damage to the tail but all in all a great success!! Chris was clearly over the moon with the spectacle we'd just realised for him seeing both of his large models operated together as a pair!

Flying continued at pace all afternoon in good conditions, but as early evening arrived we saw a swing in wind direction from North West to our most favoured South West slope — and those who were still in attendance enjoyed some superb conditions back up on the main tank-track site from where we flew until sunset.





Photo 12: Tim Mackey launches Bob Jennings Fouga Magister during 'golden hour' — sublime.

In particular the final hour of light generated some sublime photographic conditions and some very memorable moments with Bob Jennings flying his 'Tiger Stripe' Fouga Magister against a superb sunset horizon as well as a clear moonlit sky! Jet Provosts and Mustangs were also in action revelling in the great conditions. As a small group we flew on until very last light, some forced to derig and load their cars by moonlight! What a superb days flying we'd all just enjoyed!





Photo 13: Phil Cooke's small scale Jet Provost darting about in the final rays of daylight.

Day 2 — Sunday

Sunday dawned with a weather system which looked frustratingly accurate to the forecast. Winds were from the southeast (the only wind direction which isn't ably supported on the Orme for flying models of our type) with accompanying heavy rain showers which looked aligned to be with us until early evening. Conditions were forecast to improve around 6pm, with the skies due to clear and the wind due to swing back round to the ideal southwest direction — but there were many hours of poor weather to endure before that. As a result, only a handful of modellers ventured up the hill on the Sunday morning, and a few of those departed at lunchtime (myself included!) But those who stayed on were richly awarded with another 'golden hour' evening session — fair play to all that stuck it out!

The following wording is kindly provided by PSSA member Al Gorham:

Those that were able to stay on (and who weren't dispirited by the ceaseless rain) were rewarded with a brightening sky from the Holyhead direction. I had a quick proving flight in light drizzle with my Hawker Tempest at 5.15 and found the wind was bang onto the slope and generating superb lift. By 6pm, the rain had stopped, replaced with golden sunlight and models were eagerly being readied and brought to the slope.

Steve McLaren aired his A-4 Skyhawk, Jet Provost and especially his Folland Gnat. The silver and fluorescent orange RAF trainer scheme showed up extremely well with the Gnat performing brilliantly as always. Harry Twist enjoyed his maiden flight with a Shorts Tucano which has had 'several' previous owners. She went away smoothly into a long and successful flight, the first of many under the control of her latest owner I'm sure!

Bob Jennings brought a Heinkel 162 Salamander built from a Neil McHardy plan, Bob having made some modifications to the engine pod shape to improve scale appearance. The model did look a natural glider though and it was so good to see her leave my hand

steadily from launch without a click of trim needed. The Salamander looked superb zipping around and it certainly had a unique silhouette! Sadly, a slight mishap occurred on landing, but Bob knows the model is such a lovely flyer I'm sure he will have her repaired and back flying ASAP.

Andy Meade warmed his thumbs up by performing his own maiden with the large P-51D (ex Matt Jones conversion from the Blackhorse power kit). Again, the evening light showed this model off so well with its natural metal type finish.



Photo 14: Andy Meade concentrates late in the day at the start of another maiden flight. (image: Shona Meade)

Andy then produced the highlight of the weekend for me, as, aided by a launch from Bob Jennings, he got air under the wings of his O/D Gloster Meteor F3. I'm sure the accompanying pictures will tell the story perfectly, but this model has real presence and proved to be a very smooth flyer needed very little trim or adjustments during or after the first flight.



Photo 15: Andy Meade's Gloster Meteor F3 flies smartly through the LZ. (image: Shona Meade)

Indeed, the only thing missing was the distinctive Meteor 'blue-note' sound — which I am sure the other pilots watching on were hearing in their imaginations! Well done Andy — a very satisfying conclusion to your latest homebrew project, no doubt.

Another late finish on the slope then, but some truly memorable flying to round off another great weekend with the Power Scale Soaring Association.

More photos from this Great Orme PSSA event can be found on Flickr (see *Resources*, below)

There's a break now until the PSSA's next event planned at the Llyn Peninsula 10th/11th July from which time the Association will run a series of events around the UK until mid October.

For more information on anything related to Power Scale Soaring or the PSSA please see our website or drop us a line on email using the links listed in *Resources* below.

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Resources

- [Additional photos](#) (Flickr)

- [Power Scale Soaring Association \(PSSA\)](#) (website)
- [Power Scale Soaring Association \(PSSA\)](#) (email)

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