

# A 'Big Air' Weekend at 'The Big Rock'!

[Phil Cooke](#)



PSSA member Steve Kemp awaits final instruction from Harry Twist before he launches his new F-4 Phantom!

**It's been some time since a PSSA 'Fly-for-Fun' event has seen such a vast array of models — both old *and* new — being flown over the course of a single weekend. Phil Cooke reports on all the event highlights.**

Blessed both days with 25–35mph SW winds, this well attended meet on August 7th and 8th, 2021 really came to life and despite some challenges with torrential rain showers on the Saturday at the Great Orme at Llandudno, North Wales delivered once again as the scene for this memorable weekend.



The authors Hawker Sea Hurricane 'Nicki' at rest between flights as the sun breaks through!

Saturday's wet forecast drove a bigger attendance on the Sunday, but the rain proved showery for most of the day and the 15 pilots who flew on Saturday just had to pick their moment in between the weather fronts. In reality this proved quite easy, the inclement weather was clearly visible as it approached from the horizon meaning you could land out just before the rain commenced and sit in the car as it passed through. As a pilot you are spoilt at the Great Orme's 'Tank-track' site with easy access to the car park just 75m from the flying site. *'No back pack required!'* — you simply walk to and from the car for tools, food, drink — or in this case shelter — as and when required throughout the day. Admittedly the morning session was a little stop/start due to the rain, but just after midday there was a really good band



of clear sky with sunshine, the event was uninterrupted for a good three hour slot during which time a serious amount of flying was achieved by all.



Dave Worrton's large P-47 Thunderbolt gets away on another ground attack sortie!

Dave Worrton was on site with a couple of large World War II types he'd converted to PSS from power kits. We've seen his well proven P-47 *Thunderbolt* at events before, impressively bulky at around 65" span and nicely detailed for a big foamie, built for slope use from the old Max Thrust kit. This model flew numerous times in between the showers and looked to handle the conditions well, with good penetration and energy retention throughout the flight. Dave's other type was something we rarely see on the slope, again another power kit conversion from Flair Models in the form of the Messerschmitt Bf-110. At 66" span this model also flew very well, the types slender cross-section and general arrangement lending itself well to a slope model — but my attention was drawn to the colour scheme and finish.

Dave has currently finished the model in a wrap-around polished silver with high visibility RAF markings applied directly over the original German identification, representing an aircraft captured and used for allied flight test during the war. Dave explained to me that he sees this as an interim scheme and that he has intentions to produce a battle worn finish with brown paint sprayed over the silver and then sanded back to create the weathered look. We look forward to seeing this model in that new guise sometime in the future!



Hawker Typhoon flown early on the Saturday by Andy Meade.

Second World War fighters were well represented during the Saturday morning session. Andy Meade was seen putting in some good flights once again with his little Hawker *Tempest* and the larger *Typhoon*, both of these models clearly becoming 'go-to' favourites for Andy this season. Since it's last outing at the Bwlch event in July, Andy had manufactured and fitted



some impressive 'tank-busting' cannons to the leading edges of the *Typhoons* wing and he'd also got the models lighting system to work properly too, elevating this already impressive scale model up another notch!



Bob Jennings with his new P-51B built from the Janssens plans.

Bob Jennings test flew his latest new creation in the shape of a little North American Aviation P-51B *Mustang*, built using balsa clad foam and glass from the Paul Janssens' plans issued free with QFI magazine. Again, it was finished in a rare guise I'd not seen before on a Mustang — a very attractive silver and red Swiss Air Force scheme. Bob explained the colours represent a 'neutrality scheme' hastily applied to a USAAF aircraft which diverted and landed out at Dubendorf airfield in Switzerland during a bomber escort mission having suffered engine problems.

Great to have a bit of history behind this rare colour scheme and aircraft combination! Built from a well-proven plan, the model flew as well as it looked from the off, Bob clearly enjoying the flight in the high-octane conditions that were being enjoyed by all!

It was good to see Jez Billington flying his lovely De-Havilland DH-108 *Swallow* again, a model we've not seen in action for a couple of seasons now, but still looking extremely smart in its all-silver scheme with the yellow 'P for prototype' and RAF markings.



DH-108 Swallow grooving through the landing zone on another superb low-level pass!

I was very impressed with some of the flowing curved lines and low flypasts Jez put this large flying wing through, particularly considering the turbulent compression zone just ahead of the launch area — Jez flew very confidently and the model seemed to handle this with no problem at all. Some superb 'Farnborough' passes were witnessed and enjoyed by all who were watching! Steve Kemp was seen flying a number of models during the first day including his big Airbus A380 and BAe *Hawk*, but his most flown model must be the 150% scale *Jet Provost* built from the Andy Blackburn plans and finished very nicely in an early silver and orange RAF trainer scheme. Again this large, stable airframe seems to build a level of confidence in Steve not typically seen with other PSS models, allowing him to put on a real show with low, jet-like flypasts through the landing zone and when required, some really impressive, pin-point sliding landings. There are a few more of these large *Jet Provosts* in build, indeed, I have one 'half baked' on my own desk at



home — I must complete it this year and start to enjoy the same spoils clearly evident whenever Steve and Peter Garsden fly theirs!



Jet Provost looking good on finals built and flown by Pete Garsden.

Despite the relatively high wind speeds, many smaller models were being flown successfully too. John Hey flew his well proven Hawker *Hunter*, a model originally built by his dad and impressively now 40 years old and still going strong! Steve McLaren enjoyed a good flight with his New Zealand Air Force A-4 *Skyhawk*, and there was a pair of RAF *Tucanos* being flown to good effect by Martin Pope and Harry Twist. As always, the smaller *Jet Provosts* dominated at times too, an ever popular model with this group, and good for all conditions from the lightest of PSS days yet still fully capable in the higher wind speeds like we were enjoying — myself, Steve Kemp, John Hey and Steve McLaren all enjoyed some lengthy airtime with these small scale vintage jets.

Before the rain returned and settled in for the remainder of Saturday afternoon, Andy Meade elected to rig his newly completed Boeing C-17 *Globemaster III*. This is an impressive own-design model which Andy has been building and finishing in parallel with all his other work over the past few seasons, it's now ready to fly and was seen here at the slope for the first time. It's built from ply and white foam, the wings, tailplane and fin are all veneered, the fuselage is covered in brown paper and PVA prior to the entire airframe being glassed ready for paint. At 1/15th scale, this is a large model with a span of 134" and an AUW of approx 35lb. The wings are particularly impressive with huge drooping flaps and flap guides just like the full size. Like the well proven system employed on the PSS B-52 and An-225, the four engine nacelles are hollow ABS vac-forms mounted to the robust wing pylons with a 'knock off' system should that be needed on landing.



Andy Meade's impressive C-17 Globemaster III is brought forward to the launch zone.

With all checks complete, the model was readied for launch. All the navigation lights were working and everything was go with a coordinated team of helpers moving the model to the launch point — which proved somewhat of a challenge in the high winds. With the scene all set, and in hindsight with extremely fortuitous timing, a member of the launch party suddenly noticed one of the flaps begin to droop and then seconds later some white smoke was seen coming from within the airframe. Andy worked quickly through a well positioned access hatch to kill the power and isolate the source of the electrical failure, thankfully without any apparent damage to the airframe. After a little investigation it became clear that a flap servo had failed and created the short circuit which overheated and melted the wiring loom associated with that panel. We were all extremely relieved that this failure occurred during the initial launch phase and not seconds later when the model could well have been airborne! Andy will no doubt replace the damaged hardware and have this impressive model back ready for the slope at a future event.

From 4pm on Saturday afternoon the rain and clag became persistent and reluctantly we halted play for the remainder of the day, having all had a good fly in between the showers. Later that evening there was an organised group meal booked at a fantastic pub in town, 16 people in total allowing us to relax and recap on some of the days events — great to re-instate a little more social activity within the boundaries of the recently relaxed UK COVID rules!

Sunday morning dawned with a forecast much dryer than Saturday, still overcast but with the promise of improvement as the day wore on. Most importantly there was no rain, and this brought with it the increased attendance on the Sunday with over 20 pilots present at the 10am brief.

Mike Cavey had travelled across from Wigan and brought with him his lovely little Beechcraft *Bonanza*. All foam in construction from the DuraFly EP kit



and with an AUW of less than 2lb, it handled the conditions superbly and must have been one of the most flown models throughout the Sunday! Mike explained he chose the subject for PSS use as (apart from the obvious v-tail) he saw so many similarities between it and the little Jet Provosts he'd seen us fly successfully at previous meets. It's certainly a pretty little aircraft, which put on an impressive performance considering it's low AUW and the wind speeds we were flying in!

Rich Henderson was flying not only his own-design Hawker *Hurricane* but also his Mitsubishi A-6 Zero built for PSS from the Tony Nijhuis plans a few years back — again a model we've not seen flying with us at a PSSA event for a few seasons now. Both of these models were of a size and weight ideally suited to the conditions and Rich enjoyed some lengthy flights with both airframes throughout the day. At one point Rich was seen dogfighting his *Hurricane* with Tim Mackey who was flying his little Me-163 *Komet* fighter — excellent stuff chaps!



Rich Henderson's O/D Hawker Hurricane about to mix it up with the Komet fighter!

With the PSSA's Sabre Mass Build running in September (see *Resources* below) after a number of deferrals, there are more and more finished airframes being test flown and refined prior to the eagerly anticipated event. I had flown my Yugoslavian Air Force example for only the second time on the previous day, its first flight in booming lift, and today, with the lift just as favourable, Steve McLaren and Chris Barlow both decided it was time for their new creations to get airborne. Steve's example has come out with an impressive AUW below the 4lb target weight, and is finished in an attractive silver and orange scheme of the Alaskan Air National Guard. Chris has finished his Canadian-built *Sabre* F-4 in the glossy camo scheme of 112 (F) Sqn based at RAF Bruggen, it's fitted with a working rudder, flaps and a wing-tank release system giving it an AUW of 5lb.



Steve McLaren's ANG F-86 seen at launch on its maiden flight.

Both aircraft got away smoothly from launch and performed very well, Steve's example I think needing a little less weight in the nose than was fitted to bring the CoG rearward a few millimetres to improve the elevator response. In the lift both aircraft put on a good turn of speed, Chris ably demonstrating some very smart aerobatics with his, before they thankfully both returned home unscathed! Time now to make any final adjustments based on that learning then wrap these models up ready for the competition in September!

Steve Kemp was seen arriving in the pits with a large new *Sea Fury*, bought second hand and converted to PSS from an old Seagull I/C power model. It spanned 66" and had an AUW of 13lb, it certainly looked the business finished in the classic Royal Navy two-tone grey scheme with the invasion stripes.





Hawker Sea Fury converted to PSS and flown by Steve Kemp.

Once everything was checked over Andy Meade provided the launch and it soared away very gracefully without any apparent need for trim change. Very impressive! Having flown for a few minutes Steve started to explore the model's envelope a little more and commenced some circuits around the back. Sadly a turn back cross wind from the downwind leg appeared to result in a tip stall which saw the model come in quite heavy, causing some damage around the front of the wing seat. I'm sure we will see more of this impressive model once some repairs are carried out!

One of the real highlights of the Sunday for me was witnessing Bob Jennings and Andy Meade flying their Sukhoi Su-27s *Flankers* together in close formation. Both models are built from the Andy Conway PSS plans, and both are finished in three-tone camo schemes representing airframes from the Ukrainian Air Force. These models require a certain amount of lift to really

get going so they are not seen that often at our events, but the slope conditions were perfect and from launch it was obvious we were about to witness something a little bit special!



Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker duo flown by Bob Jennings and Andy Meade.

Bob's airframe, originally built by Matt Jones, is fitted with LED afterburner rings mounted in chrome thrust tubes which look superb when activated! They are mixed to the (otherwise redundant) throttle stick on Bob's Tx and are programmed to pulse and flicker into life as the throttle is pushed forward, just like the real thing! Andy and Bob thrilled the spectating crowd for a good 10 minutes before each aircraft was safely circuited into a consecutive landing one after the other. A brilliant PSS display!



Tim Mackey poses with his newest slope model the Gulfstream G550.

Mid-afternoon Tim Mackey unveiled his latest PSS model, a Gulfstream 550 private jet built for PSS from the HobbyKing EDF kit. The model spanned an impressive 74" and looked superb in its gloss white finish with blue and grey trim. Tim had also fitted a high intensity flashing strobe on the upper fuselage spine which looked great both on the ground and in the air! Bob Jennings provided a perfect launch on this, the model's first outing, and after applying a little corrective trim on the elevator Tim soon settled into what was a great flight. We don't see too many private jets flown as PSS models, but these latest types in particular, designed for high altitude, long range



flight all lend themselves ideally to our sport — they have smooth, low drag profiles with huge slender wings and elegant wing tips. They would all make ideal PSS subjects!

At 4pm, as a few folk started to think about travelling back home in readiness for the working week ahead, models were landed out temporarily and a short prize giving ceremony was held for winners (voted by the pilots throughout the day) in the categories of *Best Flown Prop*, *Best Flown Jet* and *Model of the Event*. **Rich Henderson** won the *Best Flown Prop* category with his Mitsubishi Zero. **Steve Kemp** took the *Best Flown Jet* award for his large *Jet Provost*. And **Tim Mackey** won *Model of the Event* with his impressive Gulfstream 550 — for which he also took home the coveted Alan Hulme Memorial Trophy. Well done to each of the winners!



The Great Orme's South West facing slope really does provide a magnificent setting!

Just as forecast the weather improved as the day matured, it was clear we might be in for some glorious end of session conditions, as so often happens when flying at the Great Orme. Slowly the clouds dispersed and we were left with an impressive blue sky for the final few hours of soaring which turned golden as the sun started to set over the North Wales coast. Harry Twist took advantage of this moment and test flew his Royal Navy F-4 *Phantom II*, newly restored from an old Howard Metcalfe kit — commonplace in the late 1980s but now a very rare bird indeed! Steve Kemp (also a F-4 Phantom

pilot!) provided the launch and Harry very quickly started to enjoy the model as it soared gracefully up and down the South West face.



Harry Twist with his newly finished MD F-4 Phantom II built from the HM kit.

After a 15 minute maiden flight Harry brought the *Phantom* through for a couple of practice circuits before dropping her effortlessly into the soft grass — the beaming smile on his face upon retrieving the model back to the pits said it all! What a lovely way to end this busy weekend's flying!

The remaining few pilots flew on until dusk, which came far too quickly in the glorious conditions with which we were seeing the weekend out. John Hey was last to land with his fabulous MB-339 which looked stunning in the golden light we were now being bathed in. Another successful PSSA weekend on The Orme had drawn to a close.





John Hey's MB-339 enjoying every last moment of sunlight on the Sunday evening!

More photos from this superb PSS event can be viewed using the link in the *Resources* section immediately below. Well done to all who attended the event and stuck at it through the difficult weather on Saturday — I think Sunday's flying was more than enough reward for one weekend!

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## Resources

- Additional photos of the [Llandudno PSSA Fly-In August 2021](#) can be found on Flickr
- [Power Scale Soaring Association](#) website
- The [PSSA's Sabre Mass Build](#) event coming up in September 18–19, 2021



*All photos are by the author unless otherwise noted. Read the [next article](#) in this issue, return to the [previous article](#) in this issue or go to the [table of contents](#). A PDF version of this article, or the entire issue, is available [upon request](#).*