



Delivered to Your Doorstep...

...Well, almost: *Pilot's* ferry team fly a brand new Tecnam P2008 from Italy across the Med and up through France. They face 32-knot headwinds and showers – and have two days to do it

Words Colin Goodwin & Philip Whiteman **Photos** Philip Whiteman

The machine whizzed and whirred and out stuttered a fax with the famous prancing horse logo at its head: 'We are expecting Mr Goodwin next Monday for the collection of the Ferrari 456 GT,' it read. This was in 1994 and I was 32 years old, and about to be despatched to Italy to bring a Ferrari back to England. My editor at *Car* magazine hadn't told me about it and the invitation came as a bit of a surprise.

Just as it was a surprise today, twenty years later, to receive an email from *Pilot's* Editor, Philip Whiteman asking whether I fancied going to Italy with him to collect a

brand new Tecnam P2008JC and fly it back to High Wycombe. The aircraft, explained Whiteman, was Tecnam UK's new demonstrator and Tim Orchard – who runs the outfit – hadn't the time to bring it back himself. I gave the fastest reply to an email that any editor has ever received from me.

So it is ghastly o'clock at Gatwick airport and Tim Orchard, Philip Whiteman and I are about to board a BA flight to Naples where we will jump in a hire car and drive the short distance to Capua where Tecnam is based. The pattern is familiar: when visiting Ferrari you take a flight to Bologna and then hop into a hire car for the short

drive to Maranello. A drive usually done on the door handles because you are so excited about swapping Hertz's Fiat Panda for something with twelve cylinders and over 500bhp.

What used to happen in the old days is that you arrived at Ferrari to be greeted by the surprised faces of people who had forgotten that you were coming. This would be followed by bad news that the car wasn't quite finished. I had wondered if the same thing might happen at Tecnam but no; G-ZOOB (G-'2008') looks ready for the off. Orchard has come with us because he obviously wants to check over his new baby, complete an acceptance flight and



» View from the other seat

While I was confident that I could fly the aircraft, I was just as sure that it would not necessarily be on the right heading. Not only was Colin familiar with the P2008's Garmin glass, but he actually owns an iPad and makes full use of SkyDemon for all of his British and Continental trips. When I discovered he'd also made a point of actually buying paper charts for the Italian part of the journey, it confirmed that I had the ideal flying companion for the twelve-hour trip up from Capua.

Unfortunately, neither Mrs W nor Mrs G took the whole business of flight planning quite as seriously as their husbands. One reason we were forced to retreat to The Lion was to escape all the giggling over the girls' idea that we'd have to be peeing into bottles throughout the long flight - pah!

I had to endure further ribbing from my wife after enjoying a curry with some flying mates the night before departing to Capua. "I wouldn't want to share the cabin with you tomorrow - poor



Facing page: Colin explains our planned route to Tim; inspecting the aeroplane, which had just 55 minutes of production test flight time on the clock; and the final assembly area at Capua

Above: ready for departure, Philip's smile looking just a little forced (and isn't that lifejacket a bit small for such a big fellow?)

Right : booking in at Elba, Colin contemplates taking his first turn at the controls. Would he brave the sloping runway and narrow valley departure route? Read on...



also have a meeting or two with the Tecnam people.

Whiteman and I are veterans of many flying adventures together but we are very much virgin ferry pilots. I have flown quite a lot in France but haven't ventured this

After several intensive planning sessions in the *Pilot* magazine operations room (the snug at The Lion pub in Teddington) we have come up with a route. We will take off from Capua, follow the coast past Rome and then land at Elba for fuel, the

Corsica to the Cote d'Azur. Some people hate flying across open water but I'm not one of them. I don't want a problem, high over the Appenines in Italy – and besides, I have faith in both the Rotax and the craftsmanship of the people at Tecnam. (We have looked around the factory and been shown the whole build and production process, and we liked what we saw.)

It makes sense for Philip to fly the first leg because he has more type experience and for me to handle the navigation and radio as they're less important. Also, I don't want to do a wonky takeoff right in front of Tim Orchard. The grass at Capua is quite long and with Whiteman and I in the chairs, full tanks of mogas and our bags in the back we are not far off MTOW. At least it is not too hot... 

We are planning to take a brand new aircraft on a flight of almost two hours across the Mediterranean

far south before. Philip hasn't flown abroad much, apart from some point A to point A flight tests in various European countries. What he does have is time in many different Rotax-powered machines and vastly more experience in this type of aircraft than me.

loo and sandwich before continuing to Corsica and then to Cannes, where we will stay the night.

Yes, you are quite correct: we are planning to take a brand new aircraft (with 3.5hr on the airframe) on flight of almost two hours across the Mediterranean, from

» View from the other seat

Colin," was the parting shot. Perhaps she was disguising her anxiety...

In terms of my own anxiety, I was quietly relieved that Captain Orchard was happy to take me along for his acceptance flight in the 2008 and show me the taps. Tim doesn't carry a spare pound in weight and cuts a jockey-like figure next to even Goodwin, never mind me. However, we took off with full fuel and I made careful note of Tim's short-field technique; keeping the load off the

nosewheel and allowing the aircraft to accelerate to climb speed in ground effect, the rather alarmist stall warning blaring ("we'll fix that later," he said).

When the time came for the *Pilot* crew to depart, I must admit the nerves were beginning to get to me. The aircraft might have been tried and tested, but – at least when it comes to making thousand-mile ferry flights across the Med and up through France – this pilot was not. The adventure to which I had so 

Flying Adventure | Tecnam Ferry Flight



I did a bit of pre-trip research at the university of aviation that is the West London Aero Club. It didn't take long to find a few people who'd flown in Italy. The consensus was that Italian ATC is a pain in the neck and that many local pilots tend to ignore it – useful advice. Our own experience starts well with military ATC near Capua but then turns to spaghetti as we transfer to Rome. The lady ATCO keeps asking me the same questions and although I am trying to be helpful I cannot see that updates of my ETA to the same reporting point every five minutes is of much use to anyone. Fortunately we are passed onto another Roman who is more chilled and easier to hear.

After a couple of hours we land at Elba, the island where Napoleon was banged up. Not planning an extended stay, we top up our tanks with avgas and down a panini.

Now it's my turn to fly the Tecnam. My bottle nearly goes and I ask Philip to stay at the controls for the next leg, but at the last minute I change my mind and climb

into the left-hand seat. It's not the flying or the landing at Cannes that bothers me, it's Elba's northerly takeoff – or the huge hill at the end of the runway, to be exact. But all goes well, and soon we are over Corsica and then the Med. Best of all, we now have Bastia ATC in our ears and will then have Nice. French ATC is absolutely fantastic and if you've not taken your machine to France, or a club one, the last thing that should put you off is any worries with the lingo or the R/T.

What an utter joy to fly in gorgeous conditions with a highly competent mate next to you to share the tasks (not that there are many at this point) and to keep your mind off the rather large expanse of water below. Just under two hours later we arrive in Cannes, where – uh oh – the Film Festival is on. Luckily we manage to find a couple of rooms at the Campanile hotel that's a short stroll from the terminal at Cannes Mandelieu airport.

Presumably no film industry bod, even a runner, would want dare risk his

Top: Who's that celeb, strolling the Old Port in Cannes?

Left: alpine valley, seen from the security of six thousand feet

Above: Philip concentrates on not hitting mountains as we head northwest from Cannes

Below: Col strikes a relaxed pose at the controls; and G-200B at rest at Elba – two hours flown, ten to go...





Dodging showers as we cross France in an effort to keep Captain Orchard's aeroplane dry



» View from the other seat

carelessly agreed now looked rather daunting. Indeed, Whiteman and Goodwin were unusually quiet as we taxied out. With all our kit, the aircraft was more heavily loaded than it had been for the acceptance flight, and the takeoff, speeding between Capua's idiosyncratic (some would say idiotic) concrete military 'dragon's teeth' runway markers with that bloody stall warning going Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee in our ears was... well, a little character forming. However, once we were climbing safely away, Goodwin's rather more professional sounding radio patter and assured navigational instructions – "no; head more to the right" – relaxed the tension.

The horizon out over the sea vanished in murk, making much of the leg to Elba a semi-instrument flight. I found myself chasing the speed, as well as failing to maintain altitude and heading as accurately as I would have liked. Colin was too polite to comment, but was saying to myself *come on man, get a grip...* In these circumstances, the wisdom of sharing the flying and navigation duties with a companion was even more obvious.

At least the approach and my first landing, at Elba was in excellent viz – even if the P2008 didn't want to slow down to its rather low flap-limiting speed after what had looked like a pretty standard descent profile. By side-slipping I managed to both maintain an acceptable approach angle and reduce speed to the point the first stage of flap could go down, and the landing drew a pat on the shoulder and "well done, mate" from the right-hand seat. We both noted that for the landing at Cannes more of an allowance for slowing down would be needed (but I think Col forgot.)

A careful engine inspection

While Goodwin sorted out fuel at Elba, I opened the bonnet, checked the oil level and inspected every last pipe and union twice. (I doff my hat to Tecnam's design team: their centre-hinged cowlings allow a really close inspection of the engine – very reassuring when one is facing two hours' flying, out over the sea.)

In the event, coasting out from Corsica for Cannes was not as nerve-wracking as I'd feared. Flying this leg of the journey, Col was cool about it and – just as he'd predicted – the French ATCOs spoke excellent English and were very helpful. The Rotax was

thrumming its steady tune and flying at just under 6,000 feet, we knew we had much more time to deal with an ever more unlikely seeming emergency. Thoughts about taking off one's shoes to wedge open the doors and ditching as much as possible into wind and in-line with the swell receded as the minutes and hours ticked by... and then we had just ten miles to run and were enjoying the wonderful feeling that we'd made it.

Pull up? You must be kidding

After what seemed like a well-deserved evening off in Cannes, tension wound up again during the first part of our flight to Valence. Climbing out along the western valley route from Cannes both had both the Garmin's electronic female genie warning about terrain and telling us to "pull up" and SkyDemon throwing red rings around peaks and masts all around. Staying low might have speeded progress in what was proving to be a substantial headwind, but I had gleaned enough from mountain flying articles in this and other magazines to know it was none too bright to be skimming ridges, even at the advised 45-degree angle. Climbing to 6,500 feet to avoid the severe turbulence being reported left us battling a 32-knot headwind – but at least enjoying a relatively smooth and safe ride.

From Valence onward the winds eased and the only issue was dodging showers, which put us off track a few miles. Our triple navigation system – the panel G3X, SkyDemon on Col's iPad and the charts – ensured these diversions were completely stress-free. As we progress up through France, the flying became increasingly enjoyable and we came to appreciate the P2008's decent turn of speed and generally very nice handling characteristics: it really does provide a lovely seat in the sky, and its modest sixteen-litre-per-hour cruise fuel consumption makes it an economical one too.

By the time we got back to White Waltham (Wycombe was closed) Col had become totally enthused with the idea of forming a syndicate and buying a 2008. Easy to fly, capable of carrying a decent load (the MAUW has just been raised to 650kg), roomy, fast enough and yet frugal, it really is a very fine little Continental tourer – as we'd discovered first hand. **PW**



Crossing the Channel, which by this stage of the journey looked like a pond



Not wrestling, but handing over the keys to aircraft owner Tim Orchard of Tecnam UK

credibility by staying next to the airport, twenty minutes from the red carpets. Amazingly, when we do venture into town, two of Britains' most influential and best-loved aviation scribblers are left entirely alone by the paparazzi. But seriously, at Cannes there are only film stars. (We are pilots, which of course is something more special still.)

Whisky Delta departure

In the morning we're given Whisky Delta 2 as our departure route and thankfully (and somewhat unusually, in an attempt to impress Philip) I have done my homework and thus for once avoid having to fess up to ATC that I don't have a clue about the departure procedure.

We heard north-west to avoid the mountains, fly west abeam of Mount

of French low-level military routery to fly over. (These corridors can be a bit off-putting to the novice Franco-flyer but they really are low and are often cold - ATC will let you know the score if you ask.) There aren't even many nuclear power stations on this side of France, at least not on our track.

I grease the Tecnam onto the tarmac at Troyes, helped in the task by a very long final approach that allows me to slow down sufficiently to lower the flaps. The worrying question is will I now have lost the knack of landing my taildragger Vans? Hopefully not.

Troyes is one of those French airfields that is tidy, with good facilities and is a

all around is the moving sight of orderly Commonwealth War Graves that from the air look even neater than they do on the ground.

Surprisingly, I don't miss my RV's 155 knot cruise at all. I think I would if we had simply popped to France for the day, but on a mammoth trip like this from south of Rome, speed - or the lack of it - doesn't matter a jot. This is an adventure and adventures finish all too soon if you rush them.

As usual Calais is deserted but we go through the motions before setting off again to cross the Channel. After the Med, the final stretch of water really does feel like a pond - especially in conditions like these, where Dover and its cliffs are visible from the off.

We have split the flying most neatly, with Whiteman starting and Goodwin flying the last leg, each of us logging around six hours P1. I manage another greaser at White Waltham, which is essential as it's highly likely that Tim Orchard is waiting for us to arrive. When he appears, he is clearly happy to see G-ZOOB here in one piece, albeit with a liberal smattering of insects.

It is quite a responsibility to deliver a brand new aircraft. But then again, it's quite a responsibility to hand over a brand new aircraft to two blokes who were immediately going to take it on a long overwater flight. I am not quite sure Tim saw it that way though. ■

On a mammoth trip like this from south of Rome, speed - or lack of it - doesn't matter a jot. This is an adventure...

Ventoux and head up towards Valence where we plan to swap seats and use the facilities. We don't need fuel because the little Tecnam has an impressive range.

It's my turn at the stick as we head north to Troyes where we will need fuel and also a sarnie or two. There are a few showers en route and some high ground around Lyon. We dodge both because Mr Orchard had looked horrified when I mentioned rain before we set off. He doesn't want his new machine (and its propeller) jet washed. On this leg we enjoy further excellent ATC and only a little bit

pomme in the *oeuil* of the local community. Just because it has bizjets on its apron it doesn't suddenly think it's an international airport and charge accordingly - my *bête noire* Bournemouth, take note!

I've flown over the Somme and what was the Western Front before but it's hard to sightsee when you're at the controls. Philip is flying this next leg, which will end at Calais, so I can have a good look at this most poignant countryside as it slips below us at just over 100mph. Baupaume is below, Arras in the distance, and dotted