

Not an ordinary holiday flight

Light aircraft pilots visit Vaisala

A group of seven private aircraft pilots visited Vaisala's headquarters in Finland in summer 2008, and toured the factory floors to see where the most accurate weather measurement instruments in the world are developed. All arrived at the Helsinki Malmi airport in their own planes, most also accompanied by their wives. Helsinki was one of the stops in their tour of Northern Europe – Norway, Finland and Sweden.

"We do a one-week tour every year to different parts of Europe. We wanted to visit Vaisala to explore weather equipment suitable for small airfields. I'm particularly interested in lightning detection equipment," explains Anthony Bowles, one of the pilots. Mr Bowles owns a Cirrus SR22 aircraft. It is a modern piston engine light aircraft, cruising at about 170 kt at between 9,000 and 15,000 feet, and with a range of about 1,000 nm.

IFR rated pilots can fly in demanding conditions

All seven are members of the PPL/IR Europe, an organization open to pilots

who are interested in operating a light aircraft under Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) in Europe. A pilot who is rated for IFR can keep a plane in controlled flight solely on the data provided by his/her instruments, even if that pilot cannot see anything out the cockpit windows. One of the benefits of the IFR rating is the ability to fly through clouds, which is otherwise not allowed. "This rather demanding flying qualification brought us all together, and the PPL/IR Europe association was formed over ten years ago," Mr Bowles explains.

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"I originally became involved in private flying in 1971 as a young lawyer involved in the planning inquiry for extending the runway at London Gatwick. I had an opportunity to fly in a light aircraft and decided to learn to fly myself. I obtained

my basic license that year, and did my training for the instrument rating in 1974/75."

All pilots must have some meteorological training as part of their qualification. Mr Bowles has an extensive weather station at his house in Corsock, Southwest Scotland. It measures wind, barometric pressure, temperature, rainfall and sunshine. He also has a visibility and present weather sensor, as well as a laser ceilometer. Data collection is automatic and it can be viewed remotely on his personal website. "I also have a remote hill station recording wind, temperature and relative humidity. The data is collected by a Vaisala weather station and transmitted by radio modem back to Corsock, some 5 km away. One of the displays has been developed especially for me," Mr Bowles explains. "My Vaisala equipment has performed very reliably over the years. I particularly like the open connectivity of the software, which allows for modularity and easy integration."

Real-time weather data needed throughout Europe

The availability of real-time weather data for pilots of small planes is still a challenge in Europe, according to the PPL/IR Europe team. "Icing is a real problem. We need to know where the moist clouds are, so we can avoid them. When you're flying in challenging conditions, like we all do every now and then, you're heavily dependent on technology. Reliable information about the surrounding conditions adds to your peace-of-mind. Common weather information throughout Europe would be most useful for us," all seven agree. ■



David Tucker, Stephen Niechcial, Mark Goodey, Anthony Bowles, Jim Thorpe, David Sowray and Paul Turner visited Vaisala to explore weather equipment suitable for small airfields.