



## STAPLEFORD MOURNS THE PASSING OF JOHN CHICKEN

**It was with great sadness that Stapleford Flight Centre marked the passing of Managing Director John Chicken in February. He will be greatly missed by both the flying fraternity and the world of horse breeding. Announcing John's death, his family paid tribute:**



MANAGING DIRECTOR JOHN CHICKEN

*A man of remarkable character, known for his dedication and passion for aviation. He poured his heart into creating a welcoming environment for all who entered Stapleford Flight Centre, fostering a community built on friendship and shared experiences. His kindness, generosity, and unwavering strength touched the lives of countless individuals.*

*John was deeply loved by his family and a wide circle of friends. He inspired us all with his commitment to excellence and his tireless efforts to ensure that Stapleford Flight Centre was a place where everyone could pursue their dreams of flight. His enthusiasm for aviation was infectious, and his wisdom and mentorship will be sorely missed.*

*Let us also celebrate the beautiful moments we shared with him. We encourage you to share your stories and memories of John, as they will keep his spirit alive within our community.*

John was originally a livestock farmer and never learned to fly. He was often quoted as saying, "Chickens don't fly." However, he "married into aviation" when he met Tania Frogley, daughter of Stapleford's owner and founding father, Roger Frogley.

Subsequently, it was his commitment and determination that enabled Stapleford Flight Centre to develop

into what is now one of the UK's leading training schools for the airline pilots of tomorrow, as well as a highly successful and popular flying club.

For many years, John worked side by side with his daughter Pamela, "often playing good cop, bad cop" as they navigated the challenges of running a successful business. Pamela now succeeds her father as Managing Director.

John was always a familiar, friendly figure in the Stapleford Clubhouse, and he was a leading light and founding member of the Masonic Aeronautical Lodge, which meets regularly in the Clubhouse.

In parallel with building up Stapleford as a centre of excellence for flight training, John also achieved considerable success breeding Hackney horses, many of which became champions worldwide. He won The Breeders' Cup in 2023 and was awarded the Hackney Horse Society's Outstanding Achievement Award in 2024. He was immensely proud of the Stapleford Stud. John's horses are a familiar sight in the fields adjoining the airfield. His granddaughter Sophia shared his interest in horses and has now taken over the stud.

Stapleford remains a proud family-run business, now under the leadership of Pamela, with her twins Sophia and Oliver working alongside her. Together, they are not only continuing John's legacy but also looking to the future with exciting projects in the pipeline - including the development of a brand-new website - as they work to ensure Stapleford continues to thrive as one of the UK's leading flight schools.

A memory book has been placed in the Clubhouse for those who wish to take a quiet moment to write down their memories and tributes to John. All are warmly encouraged to contribute - your stories will help keep his spirit alive at the heart of Stapleford.



JOHN WITH SOPHIA AND OLIVER

## TRIBUTES TO JOHN CHICKEN

### Lord Alan Sugar:

I think everyone who knew John would say he was a very special character. I first met him back in 1973 when I started my PPL training. He was a man of few words to me, other than spotting I had a new Rolls-Royce and joking, saying he'd give me fifty quid for it.

However, as time went by we developed a rather interesting relationship with special banter. Due to business reasons, I stopped flying around 1981 but came back to it in 2003. I called John and said I wanted to get my licence back and asked what the best plane was he had. He'd just bought a new Piper Warrior, G-CBYU. After 12 hours retraining, I got my licence back. I then imported a new Piper Arrow, G-WAMS, which I eventually sold to John.

The thing is, with John you didn't need any contracts or things in writing — once you shook hands, it was a done deal, just the way I like to do business.

Over the years, from 1973 to 2025, there's been a flow of characters at the club. John would get to know his punters — good, bad, and indifferent — and sum them up in his special way. I'm sure everyone will join me when I say we lost a special man. That image of him sitting at his reserved position in the Clubhouse will be one we all remember.

**Rest in peace, my friend.**

### Colin Dobney, Head of Training – Stapleford Flight Centre:

I consider myself fortunate that John and I hit it off back in 1987 when I was learning to fly. As a brand-new instructor, at a time when the GA industry was such that people were actually offering to pay to instruct, John took me aside and told me he was going to take me on.

It was up to me to convert trial lessons to PPL courses. I kept my head down and worked hard. Unbeknownst to me, JC was quietly watching and, as time went on, he was instrumental in my progress within Stapleford.

We got to know each other and found we'd laugh at the same things. He'd tell of his early days, his horses, the latest argument with 'er indoors' - but what surprised me most was his ability to listen, tell it as it is, and sometimes give really sound advice.

I miss walking into the Clubhouse and seeing him sitting there, saying, "Sit down, boy! What's going on?" When I returned to Stapleford in 2001, it was because I felt a loyalty to the man who gave me my first chance. I thought I'd stay a few years, but here I still am. Why? Because JC was a man after my own heart. I liked working for him. He supported ideas and wanted Stapleford to reach its full potential.

**There will never be another. RIP big man.**

### George Galanopoulos, CEO Luxaviation UK:

We often meet people in our lives who inspire us and shape our future. JC was certainly one of those for many of us.

A man of few words, but also a man of integrity and wisdom. Saying that I learned a lot from him would be an understatement. Above all he taught me that a man is as good as his word.

His sense of humour and directness made us all laugh daily. I could probably write a book of his hilarious stories! I only came to Stapleford to work as a flying instructor for a couple of years in 1988 - and 37 years later, I'm still here. John had a lot to do with that.

Though he is no longer with us, his impact lives on.

**A true legend.**



JOHN CHICKEN WITH GEORGE GALANOPOULOS

### Captain Ashwin Thomas - Flight Operations and Training Inspector - Civil Aviation Authority:

I started learning to fly at Stapleford in 1992 at the age of 13. Working weekends, I managed to afford one flying lesson per month, eventually gaining my PPL at 17. During those three years, John allowed me to gain experience working in the hangar and refuelling aircraft every weekend.

After gaining my PPL, I worked in the Radio Room providing Air-Ground Radio Service and was also part of the Rescue and Fire Fighting team. I went on to complete my CPL-IR and gained an Instructor Rating. John and Pam then offered me a full-time position as a Flight Instructor at the age of 19 - which I held for two years.

Those formative years laid the foundation for my career: flying Shorts 330s/360s on night freight, then moving to Excel Airways, Ryanair, and later becoming Base TRI at Stansted and eventually Deputy Chief Pilot for Ryanair UK. Now, I serve as a Flight Operations and Training Inspector at the CAA.

To think it all started by asking John for jobs around the airfield. I'm so grateful. I managed to get a message to

John through Pam shortly before he passed, to let him know one of "his pilots" had made it.

**Thank you, John.**

## STAPLEFORD INTERNATIONAL

Stapleford Flight Centre is a truly international training establishment with the ATPL courses often attracting students from all corners of the world.

Stapleford runs two ATPL ground school courses a year, one in September and one in January. Our September 2024 students have just completed the eight-month gruelling course which will culminate in their last exams at Gatwick airport.

Successful completion of ground school exams means the student can now progress onto CPL and MEP/IR training. Most ground school students decide to continue their training with us. The next new ground school course starts in September 2025. This is now fully booked.

**Anyone wishing to enrol on ATPL ground school should contact Helen Ayres at [commercial@flysfc.com](mailto:commercial@flysfc.com)**



ATPL GROUND SCHOOL STUDENTS

## OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR CHANDRA

**Chandra Nauth-Misir has been presented with The British Women Pilots' Association Essex and Herts branch Award for Outstanding Achievement**

Chandra has just obtained her CPL at the age of 58. Her ambition is now to train as a flight instructor. She originally trained for her PPL at Stapleford in 2016/17 as a hobby, while continuing to work on demand as a frontline NHS health practitioner.

While taking part in most Flying Club fly-outs, Chandra racked up over 45 hours of PIC time in her first year - effectively hour-building without realising it. Bitten by the flying bug, she pursued a Night Rating and IR(R) training though this was interrupted by the COVID lockdown.

Encouraged by other instructors, Chandra signed up - at age 55 - for the ATPL ground school course, its 26 exams, and subsequent multi-engine and CPL

training. Her goal now is to become a flight instructor - hopefully at Stapleford.

The BWPA Award - "a complete surprise" - was presented by BWPA Chair Sharon Nicholson. Chandra thanked her fellow pilots "who supported me through what has been a longer journey than most to get my CPL."

"I have faced many challenges, but I encourage people who want to take up flying that although age is a hurdle, it is not a barrier."



CHANDRA RECEIVES HER BWPA AWARD FROM SHARON NICHOLSON

## SAFETY MATTERS

**In the interests of the safety of pilots and their passengers, pilots are urged to take heed of recent issues recorded in Stapleford's Aviation Safety Reports:**

**Infringements:** In controlled airspace in the Southend zone, there have been reported incidents of "level busts" where pilots have entered controlled airspace without clearance, resulting in Mandatory Occurrence Reports. While SkyDemon is a helpful tool for providing warnings of potential infringements, pilots should avoid becoming over-dependent on it and must maintain their fundamental navigational skills.

**Fuel Management:** To eliminate the risk of running out of fuel, it is essential to check fuel quantities before departure, pull back to cruise power in the cruise rather than flying at full throttle, and lean the mixture when flying above 3,000 ft.

**Brushing Up on Essential Skills:** Practising core skills such as stalls and practice forced landings is vital to avoid falling into bad habits. The instructional hour required for the renewal of an SEP rating provides an ideal opportunity for this.

**Carbon Monoxide (CO):** New regulations introduced earlier this year mandate that most SEP aircraft be fitted with electronic CO detectors. The benefit of this was demonstrated when one such device in one of our aircraft emitted a warning bleep.

After an expeditious return to Stapleford, inspection revealed that a section of the exhaust had fractured, allowing CO fumes into the cockpit. The pilots had not noticed any fumes, and the older card-type CO detector in the aircraft had failed to display the telltale black dot. This incident illustrates just how insidious CO poisoning can be. At the first sign of a CO alert, pilots should plan to land as soon as possible, turn off the heater, and open all fresh air vents and windows.

## THE FUN OF FLY-OUTS

**Stapleford's monthly fly-outs to destinations across the Channel are in full swing, and plans are afoot for "going Dutch" this summer.**

So far this year, Stapleford pilots have enjoyed convivial trips to the ever-popular Le Touquet and to Calais, gaining valuable experience with cross-channel procedures while exploring and sampling French cuisine.



FLY-OUTERS ENJOYING LUNCH IN FRANCE

Following the two French excursions, the next destinations will include the Netherlands, with a fly-out to Midden Zeeland planned for Sunday 25 May, and a further trip to Rotterdam to follow during the summer.

Fly-outs are organised by Ed Gorbans, who provides briefings and assists with the necessary paperwork, including flight plans, customs forms, and more. These trips are an excellent way to get to know fellow pilots, share flights and costs, become cross-Channel checked, or to renew currency.

In the event of poor weather, every effort will be made to identify an alternative UK destination.

**Life jackets are mandatory for all cross-channel flights and can be hired from Reception at Stapleford. If you are interested in taking part in upcoming fly-outs, please contact Ed Gorbans at: [flyoutssfc@gmail.com](mailto:flyoutssfc@gmail.com) or call Stapleford Reception on 01708 688380.**

## SUCCESS STORIES

**Congratulations to all students who have recently flown their first solo, and to those who have achieved their PPL!**

### FIRST SOLO:

Dean Barclay, Jemal Deniz, Bilal Ibrahim, Kabir Kussa, Fable Lacey, Liebel Schlesinger.

### SKILL TEST:

Louis Crowe, Cavan Day-Lewis, Elliot Irons, Max Kemp, Vanish Khatri, Josh Knightbridge, Louis Slater, Thomas Slater, Mykola Soroka.

### INSTRUMENT RATING TESTS:

Lewis Berry, Evie Bowen, Kathan Dudhela, Ryan Francis, Simon Guraya, Kirith Panesar, Joshua Purdie, Mahesh Vekariya, Summer Ward.

### COMMERCIAL PILOT'S LICENCE:

Umar Abd-Alghani, Morgan Buchanan-Wilson, Robert Dewar, Freddie Green, Joe Hooley, James Hussey, Chandra Nauth-Misir, Ryan Parry, Renzie Perez, Emma Roberts, Hayley Thomson, Holly Thompson, James Turner.

## OPEN DAY FOR PILOTS

**Stapleford Flight Centre is holding one of its regular Open Days on May 17 at 14.30 for anyone interested in pursuing a career in aviation and wants to know more about the training opportunities at Stapleford.**

Presentations will be given by Colin Dobney, Stapleford's Head of Training and by Shaun Eason, Chief Theoretical Knowledge Instructor.

These will cover: Integrated Training, Private Pilot's Licence, ATPL Theoretical Knowledge Studies, Commercial Pilot's Licence, Instrument Rating, Multi Engine Rating, Multi-crew Cooperation and Upset Prevention and Recovery training.

After a question-and-answer session there will be a tour of the Stapleford Flight Centre which will include a look at the training aircraft, the flight simulators, and the on-site student accommodation.

Afterwards drinks and a small buffet will be available in the Clubhouse, providing an informal opportunity to meet with and talk to flight instructors, students and with Commercial Course Co-ordinator, Helen Ayres.

**If you are interested in attending the Open Day, you will need to register by contacting Helen Ayres on 01708 687103 or emailing: [commercial@flysfc.com](mailto:commercial@flysfc.com)**

TAKE OFF is edited by Sue Rose ([suerose.pr@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:suerose.pr@hotmail.co.uk)) and designed by John Pasche. Please do send us your stories, your photos and your ideas.

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