PIPER MALIBU AND ITS UK PILOTS TO CLAIM NEW WORLD RECORD

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16 countries in 24 hours with Piper Malibu light aircraft! Intrepid British pilots Mike Roberts and Nicholas Rogers are awaiting formal verification of their feat from the *Guinness World Record Organisation.* Currently it lists the most countries visited by fixed wing aircraft in 24 hrs as 11, achieved by James van der Hoorn and Iain Macleod back in 2010.

Mike, owner of flying club and flight training school Take Flight Aviation, based at Wellesbourne Airfield, Warwickshire and Nicholas Rogers, a B737 Captain based at Birmingham Airport, undertook the challenge on Tuesday, 25th June. They now await formal verification of their feat from the *Guinness World Record Organisation,* which currently lists the most countries visited by fixed wing aircraft in 24 hrs as 11, achieved by James van der Hoorn and Iain Macleod in 2010.

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As well as fulfilling a personal challenge, Mike and Nicholas embarked on the initiative to raise awareness of the ongoing campaign to *Save Wellesbourne Airfield*, which since 2015 has been under threat from closure from its Landlords, despite the local authority's attempts to purchase it and retain its current use.

"In doing this trip and taking in 16 countries, we wanted to demonstrate how accessible Europe can be served by general aviation aircraft – for business and leisure - and raise the awareness of the terrific standards many GA airfields offer," Mike Roberts said. "We are passionate in our belief that preserving our local airports is vital for Great Britain plc.; for the training of future pilots and also for the inevitable role they will be able to play in supporting the next generation of aircraft (including these hybrid and electric models) that don't require the infrastructure and cost of big airports."

"We didn't want to just beat that 2010 World Record, but beat it by a substantial margin," Nicholas Rogers added. The 2008-built Piper Malibu averaged a cruise speed of 190 mph and its performance was outstanding, he noted.

Their journey with the Malibu commenced with a night departure from Denmark's Roskilde Airport near Copenhagen at 3.30am (local time) visiting Sweden as the sun rose, before returning to Denmark briefly and onwards to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium and France.

"We chose to contact several airports in each country so we could build an optimum route based on who could accommodate us and what facilities were available in terms of runway surface and length, fuel, customs and operational hours and were pleased to receive a positive and friendly response from everyone. Maastricht Aachen Airport, in the Netherlands was especially enthusiastic with its fire crew honouring our arrival with a water cannon salute. By then, we knew we had broken the existing world record," said Nick.

The pair give themselves 24 hours to complete the 1,700 plus miles' flight (excluding the positioning), with over half the time in the air, allowing a further eight to 12 hours on the ground for refuelling, airport handling, customs and rest.

They also faced record temperatures in Central Europe with 38 Celsius on the ground in Italy and staggering outside air temperatures over 30 Celsius in the air.

Delays with customs in Hungary and gaining permissions in France and weather closing in at home meant that the final 17th leg was dropped so the pair took time out to relax in Lille.

"The response to our challenge was very positive and we were heartened to see people waiting to greet us from 4am (local time) in Sweden. We were welcomed with many fantastic facilities geared to handle General Aviation which could certainly be replicated by Stratford District Council at Wellesbourne," Mike highlighted.

Stratford District Council are in the process of a Compulsory Purchase of the airfield to maintain its aviation use. Meanwhile, some of the remaining tenants are taking action in the Court of Appeal to try and maintain their tenancies and overturn a previous ruling, which surprisingly went against them.

Mike and Nicholas have broken world records before. They currently hold the Guinness World Record for the greatest number of airfields visited in 24 hours, when they landed at 87 airfields in

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the UK in a Cessna C172 in 2017.

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