



● Jacek's Tiger Moth was key to training Polish pilots in World War II

# A pilot's passion

A Wizz Air pilot for over five years, Jacek Mainka's love for flying extends to a vintage flying icon, his own 1930s Tiger Moth

Interview **Piers Townley** Photos **Andrzej Rutkowski**

## How did your passion for aviation, the de Havilland 1930s Tiger Moth and World War II history begin?

My grandfather was a fitter with the famous Polish 303th "Kościuszkowski" and 308th "Krakowski" Squadrons in 1940-46. I used to go with him to veteran pilots' reunions when I was a child. Those elderly gentlemen were very special. During the war, everyday

problems were very real. They didn't care about things we do nowadays – our jobs, money or where to go for a holiday. They saw their friends fighting the war every day and that made them calm and gentle but strong. Then I went to study aeronautics at Warsaw Institute of Technology, joining the student aero club immediately and started to fly gliders and motogliders.

## What inspired you to look for such an old flying machine?

I always wanted to feel "how it was" to fly a WWII airplane. The Tiger Moth type was born in 1932 and soon after became a standard Royal Air Force basic trainer. Experienced Polish pilots who came to the UK during at the beginning of the war were tested on Tigers before joining RAF ➔

→ squadrons during the Battle of Britain. Others, those who joined later, were trained on them. So virtually all Polish airmen once flew a Tiger Moth.

Also the Tiger Moth is an old and relatively simple airplane; there are no brakes, no electrics, no starter, so it's relatively easy and inexpensive to fly.

### **Is it difficult to learn to fly a Tiger Moth after flying a modern Wizz Air Airbus?**

I still have a pre-war Polish Air Force instruction book from the thirties given to me by my Grandfather. I read the manual during the training for my commercial license 20 years ago. The book was useful then, but I

can appreciate some of the advice only now. It said that: "any loose object in the cockpit will eventually fall out". It doesn't work in an Airbus, but it does in the Tiger - any object you let fall you'll see again for a short moment when coming out of a loop!

### **Do you have a favourite flight route on the network?**

Luton is a special place for my Tiger Moth T-7230 and its history. In August 1940, it was taken over by Royal Air Force and sent to a basic training school. It was an exceptional time as the Battle of Britain had already started. Then in 1941-43, it was used to train pilots as part of the 24 Elementary

Flight Training School based... at a small field North of London, currently known as London Luton International Airport. So the same place but a very different time... When I fly over Europe I think about some 300 or so RAF pilots who were trained on my Tiger. We peacefully cross the same sky now in a nice Wizz Air A320 but I'm always reminded how much more lucky we are than our Grandfathers' generation. ●



"When you speak to pilots, it becomes clear that their passion for flying extends much further than commercial airplanes. It fuels their career choice."  
**WIZZ editor Piers Townley**

