

Civil Air Support Pilot is the fastest Milkman from the West!

Monday 22 November, 2021

Healthcare professionals have always promoted breast milk as the optimal source of infant nutrition and immune protection, but when mother and baby are separated by more than 220 miles of land and open sea, presenting baby to her mother's breast is simply not an option!

This became the case for a young mother at a Paediatric Intensive Care Unit in Ireland whose baby needed to be removed to the Great North Children's Hospital in Newcastle for urgent treatment. Whilst local milk banks were able to offer donor human milk as a substitute, paediatricians from the European Committee of Nutrition (ESPGHAN) stress that fresh own mother's milk is always the first choice in preterm infant feeding, and "*strong efforts should be made to promote lactation.*" *

Mercifully, in this case lactation was not the problem. It was a simple question of geography, logistics, and coordination. When the call came in from the Newcastle Hospital to the Milk Bank at Chester, they contacted the Nationwide Association of Blood Bikes. The NABB determined that the solution would require air transport to link up with their locally based groups in Ireland and Newcastle to relay the 20 litres of frozen pasteurised breast milk, and so they called in Civil Air Support.

As frozen things tend to thaw (and a hungry mouth was waiting to be fed), speed was of the essence. Civil Air Support quickly scrambled a twin-engine Diamond DA42 from Newcastle and its pilot David Ripley cut effortlessly through a headwind towards Dublin on a direct track.

Recognising the urgency of the mission, Air Traffic Controllers at Newcastle, London, and Dublin cleared the aircraft through to Weston Airport where a rider from Blood Bikes Dublin was waiting with the precious cargo. Fifty-seven minutes later the DA42 was airborne again, turning North from Runway 25 and climbing out above Dublin to its cruising altitude of 9,000 feet. Half an hour later, the UK's fastest milkman passed overhead Douglas on the Isle of Man at 250 miles per hour. After coasting-in over Whitehaven, David routed North of the Lake District and across the Pennines, turning to land on the South Westerly runway at Newcastle International where he was welcomed by local handler Naljets. Immediately the aircraft was secured, the milk was relayed to a Northumbria Blood Bikes rider and rushed to the Great North Hospital where it arrived 14 minutes later.

All in all, a good day's work and yet another example of how effective cooperation between voluntary groups and professional organisations can make such a difference to those who have an urgent need.

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Civil Air Support

T. 07976853378

E. will.ingleby@civilairstupport.com

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