

## **In memory of Max Brändli and Dani Gerwer**

As usual, the expectations were great, when our annual KZ & V rally was drawing closer. I had a few days before just returned from a lovely family occasion in sunny South of France, when I on Friday, June the 12<sup>th</sup>, arrived at Stauning Airport. As was the situation at several previous rallies, the weather forecast gave cause for some concern, particularly in the regions to the east and south of Stauning. The effect was obvious, as I worked my way to hangar 4. The extent of the flight-line was far from impressive, and I scanned in vain for the familiar white crosses on a red tail fin, which would signify the arrival of our Swiss aviation friends. I ascribed this to the inclement weather conditions, but deep down in my mind I was pleased that they had taken no risks in trying to reach Stauning.

Seeking shelter from the strong north-westerly winds in the hangar, I gradually felt cheered up, as I greeted one old friend after the other. With a few exceptions, all the old aviation buddies turned up, even if the club members from eastern Denmark had to resort to more down-to-earth means of transportation. On the actual display Saturday, my spirits were elevated even further, as improvement in the weather situation had allowed the arrival of more aircraft, and a stroll down the spectators area increased my optimism. The display itself was carried out in a satisfactory way, and reports from various organizers gave me the impression, that we had once again managed to get a successful KZ & V rally.

On Tuesday morning, June the 16<sup>th</sup>, when my wife and I were on our way to a family arrangement at my son, Jespers, an SMS suddenly ticked in on my mobile phone from one of my young, Swiss Cherry friends, who was holidaying in Ireland. Did I know anything about a Cherry accident in Sweden? I replied in the negative, but soon set about contacting friends and acquaintances in our club to get more information. There were no positive results of this, but on the return trip in the evening, I received another SMS from my friend in Ireland, informing me that Max Brändli and a friend were killed at a crash within the perimeter of the airport in Sundsvall. This tragic, laconic information was during the next few days confirmed and elaborated from several sources, not all serious and truthful. The naked facts were, however, painfully clear: Max and Dani were no longer among us! The description of an accompanying aircraft immediately made me think of Max's brother Werner and his son Roger, who were both faithful participants of our rally, and I was extremely grateful to receive a personal message from Werner about the accident. He and his son had not felt in a position to fly their Cherry home, but had returned to Switzerland by commercial airline after some preliminary investigations and inquiries. Later, a sad telephone conversation with Werner gave me more details of the sequence of events.

As many times before, the party was on a Scandinavian tour, which among other things included a trip to Finland, and, as many times before, the rally in Stauning was included in their plans. Already on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, they had arrived in Sundsvall with the intention to proceed to Stauning later in the week. As we subsequently learned, the weather conditions in that area were particularly vicious at the time, and Max was not a pilot taking unnecessary risks. It proved to be a rather long stay, and not until Monday the 15<sup>th</sup>, the weather forecasts were good enough to allow safe flying. At about 10.30 a.m. the two aircraft started out with Werner in the lead. Communication with the tower revealed that Max's aircraft reported engine problems, and shortly after, HB-YBX fell to the ground from an altitude of some 300-400 feet. Both Max and Dani were killed instantly. Werner and Roger had to stay in the circuit about 10 minutes, before they were cleared to land. The technical circumstances of the crash remain unsolved at the time of writing this obituary, and neither the Swedish nor the Swiss aviation authorities seem inclined to make a thorough investigation of the causes of this accident.

At the age of 85 years, Max Brändli was a well-known and treasured visitor at numerous rallies and flying clubs all over Europe, and he was one of the most experienced and technically gifted pilots within experimental aviation. With a tremendous effort he carried out the design and building of his BX-2 Cherry in 3 years and 4 months, an achievement that was gradually brought home to Jesper and myself during the building process with our Cherry, [lic. no. 176](#). Not least at the encouragement of our late friend and chairman of the KZ & V club, Magnus Petersen, who also highly valued Max and his visits to Stauning. Max has sold appr. 240 licences and sets of drawings since the completion of the prototype in the fall of 1982. HB-YBX and Max has in the meantime flown more than 2500 hours and made more than 3500 landings. From south to north and from east to west in Europe, Max has established a brotherhood of Cherry-builders, who never addressed him in vain with their problems and questions in connection with the building process. Whenever I sent him a mail or letter concerning a case of doubt, I never had to wait more than a few days for Max's qualified reply, and at a few occasions he paid me a visit in order personally to verify that Jesper and myself were doing the job properly. Max was one of a family of 6 brothers, of whom only 2 were active pilots. They all had an ear for music, and at one particular occasion I enjoyed the privilege of having 4 Brändli brothers spending the week-end under my roof, a festive and memorable event. Humour and high spirits was a hallmark of Max and his brothers, and those of the KZ & V club members who participated in the very successful summer tour to Switzerland in 2003 will agree that most of the success was due to Max, Werner and their friends from the Swiss aviation society. With Max's demise an era has come to an end, and all of his friends can only seek comfort in the thought of him dying while he was doing what he loved the most: flying.

In later years, when Max's medical condition was on the wane, and although he still qualified for his certificate, he always flew with a competent pilot at his side. It was in this capacity that we in recent years got to know Dani Gerwer in Stauning. This young aviation engineer was easily adopted in the Swiss group and enjoyed the atmosphere of the rally. At last year's KZ & V rally he happily and proudly informed us of his wife's pregnancy. It puts the accident in Sundsvall in an even more tragic perspective that Dani leaves a young wife and a 6 months old child. We will greatly miss Dani's pleasant company at future rallies, but our thoughts are not least with this young family, who also became the victims of this dreadful catastrophe.

Jesper and myself have been looking forward to demonstrating our completed Cherry for Max in the near future, but this was not to be. Not least this new situation has given us new impetus to finish our project, which proved to be a greater challenge than anticipated. Many times during the long building process, we have, however, paused to admire and appreciate the well-designed and qualified preparatory work carried out by Max.

Marcus, Monika, Ursula and Edith have lost a good and loving father !

Jesper and myself have lost a dear friend and mentor !

Werner and the rest of the family have lost the happy companionship of a loved family member !

The KZ & Vintage Aircraft club has lost a faithful and treasured guest at our Stauning rallies !

General- and experimental aviation has lost one of the most fiery souls of our cause !

## **All honour to the memory of Max Brändli and Dani Gerwer**

Jørgen Bornæs  
KZ & Vintage Aircraft club  
Denmark – EAA Chapter 655