

Reece Downes – Gliding Scholarship

If you had have asked me a year ago what my future career would be I wouldn't have had a clue. I can't really remember how we got round to the subject but my Dad and I got talking one day and the subject of becoming a pilot cropped up. I really wasn't sure if that would be a career for me. As you might expect from a Yorkshire Dad his advice was simple... Well its certainly expensive to go to flight school so you had better be sure before you spend my money!

Over the next year I looked around, attended a few events but still wasn't sure a career in aviation was for me, then I spotted on the internet the HCAP Gliding Scholarship. I saw it was aimed at giving flying experience to young people hoping to find more about life in the air, so I thought, why not me?

The first step was the application, writing a few words about me and why I thought it was appropriate to give me the opportunity. This was followed by the interview, my first real interview! I went down to London on a sunny day in April. Twenty five minutes of interview and I was outside



again and heading back 'up north' thinking... well that didn't go well, but the experience was worthwhile, at least I got something out of the day. I guess that's the first thing to report, just having the interview itself was a really worthwhile experience... it was even better a couple of weeks later when I got an email from Angie saying I was successful!



Then in July my Joining instructions arrived from Lt Richard Croker RN and in August I was off to HMS Sultan in Portsmouth. I was a little apprehensive at first but I certainly had no need to be nervous. After meeting up with the other students we all soon realised we were in it together and so started seven great days with brilliant people from all over the UK. We ate together, pushed gliders together, pulled gliders together and flew gliders together, got wet in the sea, played pool, made friends, got taught how to speak 'southern' and simply had fantastic experience together. I've also been able to use the week away as part of my Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award as an added bonus.

The social side was great but flying was certainly what the week was really about. From the start it was all about being in the air with 17 launches in six days and when you weren't flying, you were getting the glider ready for someone else to fly. Not only did I learn how to fly a glider but also that flying is all about teamwork.

In six days I went from someone who had never sat in a cockpit to being able to take control of take-off, the aero-tow, flying, navigation and landings. Not everything went well and it wasn't easy but by day four I attempted my first landing (ok I may have bounced a few times but it was still a landing), by this time I could also hold the glider on tow and by the end of day six I was almost ready to go solo and then it rained, and it rained and it rained a bit more!

It is probably pretty clear by now that I had a great time, met some brilliant people and learned loads during the week but the learning didn't stop even at the end of the course. On the final evening of the course we had a presentation in the club house and for me the privilege of giving the thank you speech on behalf of the students to the instructors in front of a room full of friends, families and some amazing pilots was the culmination of a great journey

There really are loads of people to thank and I am sure I will have missed a few but here goes...

Angie and the staff in the office, the 'Company' for granting me the scholarship, my instructors especially John Hale and Gerry Holden, Master Peter Benn for sponsoring my award and of course all my fellow students who made my week at HMS Sultan a great experience and one I will never forget.