

Ian Sheppard – The Noman Motley Scholarship 2016

Undertaking an instructor rating when you're also working is no easy task – so I was lucky that Redhill Aviation could offer the course as it is 100 yards from my office at the aerodrome! Air Pilots' agreeing to pay meant I could finally do something I had wanted to do since getting back into flying at Fairoaks in 2009, and certainly since passing the ATPL theory in 2011.

My instructor, Jill Develin, had just retired from British Airways where she was a captain on the Boeing 747-400. Thus you probably would do well to find someone better qualified as she is an experienced examiner and ran Redair flight schools for around 30 years with her husband Islam, who is Redhill Aviation's CFI.

After a couple of flights with Jill, Redhill Aviation had to move offices into a porta cabin, because a fire a year or two ago had destroyed most of the building including the cafe, where it started. The porta cabin is actually very functional and right next to the aircraft, although it did get rather hot on a couple of those really hot days last August!

I started in mid-July and we juggled the timetable around holidays and airshows – I write for aviation magazines, including editing the AOPA magazine Aircraft Owner & Pilot, so had to fit all that in as well, not to mention the occasional bad weather day. However, with 125 hours of ground school to complete there was plenty to do when the weather was unsuitable. Redhill Aviation's philosophy was not to rush this and to give it the time it deserved – and I found this paid off in the air as lessons and the background was well understood.



The photographer I often work with at airshows around the world, and on visits to GA airfields for AOPA, had completed his instructor rating at Andrewsfield and found the early stages very tough so I was well warned that 'Effects of Controls' (and all the building blocks that would be later applied in the circuit) were not that easy to grasp – in that you had to sit in the right hand seat, demonstrate and then allow the student to practice. Another fortunate thing for me was that I had been doing a lot of flying as P1 from the right hand seat, as the 172 I was using from Thurrock Airfield with the photographer only had a window that opened on the left!

What was harder to get used to was allowing the 'student' (which the instructor pretended to be of course) to try what you'd demonstrated to them without interfering unduly. People will only learn if they get a chance to try and see their mistakes. So everything must be clear-cut; if it's a safety issue then quickly say "I have control" and take control (i.e. do the handover taught at the start of the Effects of Controls lesson). But otherwise, see how the student does, take control afterwards and then (and only then) give feedback.



I have already attended the AOPA Instructor Refresher Seminar, in November, as I was covering it for their magazine. You have to do this in every three-year period but I found it useful doing it so early and hearing what highly experienced instructors (many of whom were also airline or business jet pilots) had to say. One said that it was still good to input the odd word while the student had control as a reminder but this has to be judged very carefully – give

them a good chance first and above all don't create dependence – because what you're aiming to do is allow the student to go solo and fly a circuit, and progress from there. Self-sufficiency is the key for them and the instructor can do a lot of damage or waste a lot of the student's time and money if they're not really learning.

I found presenting fine but Jill had a lot of good tips on how to write on the whiteboard, how to use the model aircraft as a prop, how to use colour pens, and how to allow questions and ask questions to make sure the student was awake! And, above all, how not to ramble on and go over time; 15 minutes is fine for a pre-flight briefing and 45 minutes for a long brief.

But it has to be remembered, stressed Islam, that you should not natter on – especially in the aircraft, where he recommended “Pigeon English.”

Gradually I moved through the lesson sheets, moving on to circuits, stalling, spinning – all very enjoyable and in all cases I was learning an awful lot from Jill, remembering things I did in my PPL and polishing up both my flying and my understanding. I also enjoyed practice forced landings, as again you have to think for two having to teach and then allow the student to try. Also keeping up with radio and navigation and situational awareness in general is essential, from it being entirely your responsibility to gradually sharing more and more of the task with the student – until you are able to sit back and do less and less!

There was one other student instructor but he was busy flying for EasyJet as a young captain, and doing another course at CTC in order to teach ground school there, so I moved ahead and we only had one chance to do 'mutual flying' – he taught me Effects of Controls. It was useful to see how he coped, how he was organized and how I felt being a student in that situation – all very worthwhile, and he did very well indeed (not a surprise, perhaps, but being an airline pilot doesn't necessarily translate to being a good instructor).

Moving on there was some pressure to complete the test as we were now into September, Air Pilots required us to be completed by 1st October and in any case we all had trips or holidays looming – but luckily I was deemed ready and took the test with Islam.

He is an excellent instructor and examiner known by many in the industry and it was a learning experience in a huge way just to do a test with him – I was nervous and a bit under the weather meaning my thinking wasn't as clear, but we went out and I taught him everything he wanted me to demonstrate teaching. It wasn't the greatest flight I'd ever done by a long shot but I got through, and the briefing and long brief went well.

In such situations you are bound to feel that you're not doing that well but it's a lot to bring together and the test is somewhat artificial, testing bits and pieces of the course. I comforted myself by thinking at least in lessons they are clear-cut and hopefully straightforward, as long as you brief properly, plan and follow the usual procedures.

Thankfully Redhill Aviation has good procedures and we spent a fair amount of time going through paperwork, regulations etc as the instructor has considerable responsibility, not least of which is advising students on the training they need in the first place. Not knowing the latest regulations could be costly, both to the student and to the business.

Once I passed I actually only did one flight, checking out someone on a Cessna 150, before heading off on work trips and travelling, with some flying in the USA. So 2017 is when I am starting to instruct and it will be all thanks to the Honorable Company of Air Pilots.

Long-term I would like to be able to instruct CPL, instrument and multi but first I will I need to do the 50 student flight sign-offs under supervision to be a full FI rather than an FI Restricted – FI(R), and the gradually build experience and other ratings. One step at a time!