

Oliver Welch

HCAP Gliding Scholarship 2024

Cotswold Gliding Club

Introduction

Between Sunday the 18th and Friday the 23rd of August, I was lucky enough to attend a week-long gliding course at Cotswold Gliding Club, located at Aston Down Airfield. I arrived late Sunday afternoon in order to be ready for an early start Monday morning and was greeted by my instructor for the week, Sam and my fellow HCAP Scholarship recipient Tom. After a quick chat about tomorrow's plans and any food preferences, I headed to bed ready for a busy day.

Day 1

Monday morning started bright and early with a briefing that covered the day's training plan and important safety info. After that, we cracked on with the day and started learning as much as possible. Luckily we were a small group of students (4+1 instructor) and this meant we got stuck into every task with the encouragement of our instructor Sam (who was absolutely excellent). We started by getting gliders out of the hanger and helping complete the DI (Daily Inspection). After this was completed we could tow the gliders and launch point out to the runway.

The weather on Monday morning was reasonably good, we had a reasonable cloud base and a favourable wind direction which allowed us to set up on the longer of



the two runways at Aston Down. Strong winds and the longer runway allowed winch

launches that gave us altitudes of 2000+ feet. This was excellent for our first day as it gave me more time in the air to understand the basic aircraft controls.

We also got involved in every aspect of gliding on Monday, this included launching and recovering gliders as well as running the launch point and communicating with the winch driver.

As I had minimal flying experience before this course my first flights consisted of experimenting with the flight controls and seeing first-hand how they affected the glider. This was followed by combining multiple inputs for example roll and yaw to complete banked turns. The end of every flying



day was followed by an amazing meal cooked by our instructor Sam and a thorough debrief about the day's flying and the next day's training plan.

Unfortunately for the remaining 4 days of my course, we were not so lucky with the conditions for winch launching. For the remainder of the course, the wind direction forced us to set up on the airfield's shorter runway. This limited us to shorter launches of only 1500-1600 feet.



As the week progressed so did my skill, both in the air and on the ground, launching and recovering gliders. Each day we would practice new manoeuvres that we had covered the theory for in the evening before or in the morning briefing. This included things like practising a variety of stalls, both how to recognise the symptoms and also then recover from the stall. I was also given the

opportunity to complete some aerobatics but unfortunately, we never followed through with this as when we got a chance I began feeling slightly ill after a long string of practice nosedrop stalls. My coursemate Tom however did get the chance.

Conditions for soaring also improved throughout the week and as a result, we went from 4-6 minute flights to routinely achieving 10-15 minute flights. My best flight ended up being almost 40 minutes in which time we climbed from 1500 to 4000 feet.

As well as practising stalls and soaring I was given the opportunity to fly more of the flight each day. My instructor Sam did this by first having me

follow through on the more critical parts of the flight, Winch launch, landing circuit and the landing itself. Having got the idea of how it should be done I then flew these parts of the flight. The aim for the week was for me to complete a complete unprompted flight from launch to landing. This is something I unfortunately didn't quite achieve, I suspect that nerves got the better of me on the final few flights.

Alongside our flying, we also had a chance to give the club gliding simulator a try. This was a very valuable tool for learning aerobatics and how to recover from other more serious situations like wing drop stalls.

We were also lucky enough to have Tricia Nelmes, an HCAP representative come visit us on our last day of flying to present us with certificates. It was great to talk to her about all her aviation experience and be able to demonstrate some of the skills we had developed in the week both flying and on the ground.

My experience at the Cotswold Gliding was truly excellent and it will always be one of the most enjoyable things I have ever done. I implore anyone who thinks they might be interested to apply even if they don't think they stand a chance of being selected.



Finally, I want to say a big thank you to everyone that made my week possible. Thank you to SkyDemon for sponsoring me, The Honorable Company of Air Pilots for running the scholarship and finally Sam and the Cotswold Gliding Club for being so welcoming and providing such excellent training.