



virgin atlantic 

## Virgin Atlantic Gliding Scholarship

22-26 July 2019

# Ronan Graven



I am fortunate to have been awarded a gliding scholarship from The Honourable Company of Air Pilots which has enabled me to complete five days of intensive gilding training at the London Gliding Club, Dunstable. During five days from 22-26 July 2019, I learnt a wide range of valuable new skills and information on flying generally which was just as important as the practical gliding training itself. The gliding scholarship included all expenses including tuition, accomodation and food which were all provided on site at the air field.



I first became aware of the gliding scholarship when researching about flying careers on the Air Pilots' website <https://www.flying-start.org> and I was also encouraged to apply by my local ATC squadron. The scholarship was aimed at people like me who had little or no previous flying experience. Once I had made my application, within a few weeks I was invited for interview by The Honourable Company of Air Pilots Head Office in London. This took place over the school holiday before my GCSEs. After the interview, I was notified that I had been selected for the scholarship for which I was ecstatic and excited at the prospect of gliding which would take place during the summer holidays and so it provided a fantastic experience to look forward to for when I had completed my GCSE exams.

On the first day I was warmly welcomed by all the club members and the office staff at London Gliding Club. In the morning, I met my instructor, Istvan Toth, who gave me an initial briefing and taught me about the basics of flying a gilder. After this, he took me out in a glider for two flights with each flight lasting over an hour as we soared up to 4000 feet. Istvan allowed me to take control of the glider early on helping me to understand how delicate you have to be with the controls and how the slightest movements of the stick can make a big difference to the course of the flight.



On the second day, I was allowed to take more control and learned to make turns. Once again, I had two flights which both had a duration of an hour by

finding thermals in the sky. In both of these flights I increased my knowledge about the controls and how to maintain the bank of the glider when making turns. During the second flight my instructor made acrobatic manoeuvres such as loops and a spiral dive. To my surprise, he allowed me to complete a loop by pointing the nose down and accelerating the glider to 100 knots and pulling the stick back causing the nose to pull up and complete the loop. This variation in the flight increased my flying skills and confidence.

On Wednesday we began using the winch to launch the glider. By using the winch, it meant we could complete a larger number of shorter flights in the day as it did not take as much time as aero towing. The winch gave an incredible take off experience, propelling the glider up and accelerating it to 60knots in just 2.5 seconds. By the end of the day, I had completed six flights and during the last two I made my first ever landings. This moment filled me with great responsibility and also it felt I was making good progress having now done a flight incorporating both take off and landing skills.



The next part to furthering my learning was a matter of perfecting my landings and my flying in the air by remembering to use the rudder as well as the stick to correct the flight of the glider. By the end of the day my instructor was happy to allow me to take control of the take-off which was a great experience as it meant I had full control of the whole

flight as a I made a short circuit and then landed with no input from the instructor.

On the fifth and final day of gliding we were slightly limited to the number of flights as we missed about an hour of flying time due to rain showers. However, we still managed to get up in the air and I was allowed to continue taking full control of the flight from take-off to landing. On my final flight, Istvan took me for one last flight of the week and allowed me to complete two loops in a row and before we landed he asked if I wanted to do a 'beat up'. I was slightly sceptical but was happy to give it a go as I didn't fully know what to expect. Before I knew it Istvan had taken control and pointed the nose down to the airfield below and at very low altitude pulled up so that we were gliding at only 100ft or so over the airfield. This was a thrilling final day experience.

Over the 5 days, I have learnt a huge amount and met members at London Gliding club who offered a wide range of knowledge which I learnt from and I am truly grateful for this. In summary I learned about:

1. The theory of how a glider works and gains altitude using thermals;
2. The key skills required for gliding from take off to landing;
3. The importance of delicate handling of the glider controls;
4. How to prepare for flights and to go through checklists in an orderly manner;
5. The need to remain alert and aware at all time when in the air;
6. An awareness of aeronautical charts and being aware of restrictions for flights; and
7. The importance of airfield safety at all times in and around gliding operations.

Overall, the week was incredible and like nothing else I have ever done in my life. The week has inspired and motivated me to continue with my flying and also gave me confidence that a career in flying is what I want to pursue. I hope to continue with my gliding and apply for the PPL scholarship next year. I will also be looking to get involved with gliding clubs in my local area as it is something that I have enjoyed hugely and would like to continue with.

Thank you to everyone at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, Virgin Atlantic and the London Gliding Club for creating this fantastic opportunity for me.

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