

Riva Joseph

RAF Charitable Trust

I had the opportunity to spend a week at Midlands Gliding Club this summer as part of my gliding scholarship, and it was an experience that I genuinely enjoyed from start to finish. I had been interested in gliding for a while, so being able to actually get into a glider and learn how to fly one was something I had been looking forward to. Over the course of the week, I learnt how to control the aircraft, launch, approach and land, fly circuits and, probably my favourite part, soar in thermals. I also met lots of welcoming people at the club and came away with a lot of memories that I would love to build on in the future.

We arrived at the club the day before the course started, which gave us some time to settle in, collect our room keys and get used to our surroundings. Everyone at the club was very welcoming, and we were given a briefing about what the week would look like and what we would be learning. It was nice to arrive without immediately having to worry about flying and instead have some time to get settled and meet the other people taking part.

On the first day, I had two launches. This was my first proper opportunity to take control of a glider, and it was very different from simply learning about aircraft on the ground. We started by learning about the primary effects of the controls and how the glider responds to our inputs. At first, I was concentrating quite hard on making sure I was moving the controls correctly, but as the day went on, I started to understand how the aircraft responded and became more comfortable controlling it. It was very exciting to feel that I was actually flying the glider.

The second day was probably my favourite of the week. I had three launches, and we spent time learning about thermal soaring. This was something I had particularly been looking forward to because it is one of the things that makes gliding so unique. We were able to find thermals and use the rising air to gain altitude, allowing us to stay airborne for much longer. I absolutely loved the longer flights. It was amazing to look around and realise that we were staying in the air without an engine, simply by finding and using rising air. It also made me realise that gliding involves much more than just controlling the aircraft. You have to constantly pay attention to the conditions around you and make decisions about where to fly and where you might find the next thermal.

By the third day, I was becoming much more comfortable in the glider. I completed four launches, focusing on launching, landing and the approach. I began to understand how important it was to plan ahead rather than simply react to what was happening. During an approach, for example, I had to think about my position, altitude and speed and make adjustments accordingly. This was quite challenging at first, but it was also rewarding to see how the things I had learnt during the first two days were beginning to come together.

The fourth day involved another four launches and continued to develop my skills in launching, landing and approaches. We also began practising circuits, which gave me more responsibility for planning the later stages of the flight. I found circuits particularly interesting because there was a lot to think about at once. I had to keep track of where I was relative to the airfield while also maintaining control of the glider and preparing for the approach. By this point in the week, I felt noticeably more confident than I had on the first day.

On the final day, we continued working on launching, landing, approaches and circuits. Unfortunately, we had to pack up early, so I only completed two launches, but one of them gave me one of the biggest moments of the whole course. I came very close to completing a landing by myself, which genuinely surprised me. At the beginning of the week, I was still getting used to the controls and learning how the aircraft responded, so being in a position where I could almost complete a landing independently after only a few days was something I was really proud of. It showed me how much I had learnt in such a short amount of time.

Looking back on the week, I gained a completely different appreciation for flying from being able to experience the controls, feel the aircraft respond and learn how to find and use thermals. I also learnt that gliding requires a lot of concentration and judgement, but that makes successfully controlling the aircraft even more rewarding.

Overall, I absolutely loved my time at Midlands Gliding Club. From my first two launches to the long thermal flights that I enjoyed so much, to getting very close to completing a landing by myself, every day gave me something new to look forward to. I made a lot of great memories throughout the week and met some brilliant people along the way. I would definitely love to return to the club in the future and continue developing my gliding skills.

I would like to thank everyone at Midlands Gliding Club for making us feel so welcome and for their patience, guidance and encouragement throughout the week. I would also like to thank the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for giving me this opportunity and the RAF Charitable Trust for sponsoring me. Without their support, I would not have been able to experience gliding in this way, and I am incredibly grateful for the memories and skills I have gained from the week.