



Dominik Motlib PPL Scholarship Report

Over the summer of 2026, I had the most amazing opportunity presented to me from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots – to fly a fully funded PPL scholarship. I am exceptionally grateful to my Sponsor, SkyDemon, and to the Air Pilots scholarship team for facilitating this, especially to my buddy Chris Barrott, who is the friendliest face to ask any questions to, and to Angie who is always there to help with any admin. Alongside this, I would like to thank my instructor Alison for putting up with me all summer, and the rest of the friendly faces around Leicester aeroclub, and the other airfields I have visits.

Aviation Background & Career Ambitions

My aviation journey started with gliding, as a hobby during my university undergraduate years. As I got more involved in gliding and achieved my SPL, I attended PCL and decided I wanted to fly as a career. I enjoy working procedurally, to a high standard, with talented people, and enjoy travel and working with my hands. The Air Pilots scholarship opened and I am pleased to say that I was selected.



I came into my PPL with a reasonably strong aviation background. I graduated from my undergraduate degree in 2024, and I'm currently working on a PhD in jet engine structural response to wheels up landing events. Alongside my studies I have been heavily involved in the gliding society at my University and have flown ~100 hours in 4 years over ~350 flights. I decided I wanted to take up a career as a professional pilot at PCL, and have been working to be ATPL theory ready when I graduate from my PhD.

First Steps at Leicestershire Aeroclub

My PPL journey began with a quick introduction to the key faces around Leicester aeroclub, some paperwork and a phone call with my Buddy Chris explaining that I should pay for nothing apart from the headset. For future scholars – your buddy is an easily accessible resource who has been through the same journey as you and can be a vital source of help. This introduction was followed up with a short ground school before arranging a block of flying lessons over the summer with the reception / operations desk.



It was then time for my first flying lesson – a tremendously exciting day. I arrived at the airfield with the reading material provided to me after the first hour of ground school, understanding the first 9 or so lessons. This really helped me, as I was prepared to move onto stalling and slow flight almost immediately. It wasn't all smooth on that first lesson though; I distinctly remember the first 10 or so minutes after we released our brakes were taxiing. An airfield driving lesson, steering with my feet. The rudder pedal steering was easy to pick up due to simulator experience, however, I was caught by surprise by the effectiveness of the toe brakes. There was a rough jerk forward in our seats and a slight skidding noise from outside, my first of many lessons – be gentle on the brakes!

It was my first time being in control of the take-off of a powered plane, I have flown motor gliders in the past, but never take-off and landings, which was exciting, and then I was airborne for the first time with the PPL in the distant horizon.

The upper air work was completed quickly, and then it was onto take-off circuits and landings, and I must say the landings took some time to get used to. This was one of the biggest challenges, with a different perspective to that of glider landings. As has been said to me many times (and is no consolation when you're in the thick of it), 'you can have it explained 5 different ways, hundreds of times and it can be quite inconsistent, however one day it just clicks'. And fortunately, that held true.

Circuit Stage & First Solo Flight

After ~8 hours I was solo ready and waiting to sit my operational procedures and human performance exam. I had some guidance given to me; my instructor was assured I was ready. The air law preparation I completed was probably slightly more than was required, helpful for my future ATPLs, however my instructor gave me a reality check saying, "if you prepare for every exam in this much detail you will not be finished until next Christmas!" After the wake-up call and my first lesson of navigation, it was solo time, with a full checkout before my first circuit and landing. A great feeling of accomplishment (and a little relief), before a bell ring and a cold coke zero - it was a tropical continental airmass day for sure.



Cross-Country Navigation

The navigation phase was the most enjoyable for me, the thorough planning, route study and time calculations is an extremely satisfying process. There were a couple of lessons of VOR tracking, a zone transit and some cross-country navigation before my first dual land away at Wellesbourne. Followed immediately after by my first solo cross-country land away combo flight back to Wellesbourne. I stood at the same urinal having the same nervous pee as I had merely 2 hours prior. It's a lovely airport, with a Vulcan bomber, and a whole lot of Aeros students. I found it a very enjoyable experience, especially when I cross checked how straight my line is with SkyDemon.



This was followed up by some low-level navigation and then a dual trip to Duxford, followed by a solo trip the next day. It was great to enjoy a notoriously healthy breakfast of cake with my instructor watching the classic wings in the circuit and discussing life and aviation. It was my solo trip to Duxford a few days later, where I ended up temporarily stranded with too little oil to take off. The gigantic airport fuel truck, and a very helpful worker came over to give me a small bottle of oil, and we (he) had the great idea of fashioning a paper oil funnel from an actual sheet of A4 paper. That worked very well, before I was on the freshly resurfaced runway and back on my way to Leicester where the very funny radio operator asking me if I had enough oil on my join information request.



FRTOL & QXC

The following lessons were some more upper air work, bad weather circuits, and the beginning of skills tests practise, with the exam revision, and FRTOL ~~worrying~~ revision being completed ready for my QXC day. Luckily, all went well and after some extensive preparation I was rumbling down RW 28, full tanks, enroute

to Wellesbourne on my first leg. On this visit I was landing in the other direction this time with a slight panic on downwind, as I temporarily convinced myself I should be flying a left-hand circuit rather than a right hand. After a panicky 10 seconds, all was okay, (I was indeed flying the correct right-hand circuit) before I was on the ground and talking to the friendly FISOs for my first signature.



As I was crossing close by to Cranfield, enroute to Duxford, with my newfound FRTOL confidence (and Aide-Mémoire in my kneeboard) I got a basic service and communicated with the aircraft on their extended centreline trying to land as "STUDENT G-HJ" was bimbbling around at 90 Knots somewhere right where they wanted to be. It was very satisfying to use what I had learned with good problem solving, communication and teamwork from the controller and other pilots operating in the area.



As I was approaching Duxford, I had swapped frequency and they kindly accommodated a straight in approach shortly before I was in their tower talking to the other very friendly FISOs about how she used to fly G-BOHJ. She affectionately called G-BOHJ 'bodge' which confused me at first, with me asking her to repeat it a couple of times and then explain. I find bodge an entertaining name which has stuck with me since that conversation (and 'Bodge' has stuck with her new Leicester crowd).

Skills Test Preparation



The following week I had my skills test, so from my QXC high, straight into some exam revision, and chair flying speeds, and manoeuvres with a couple of mock tests with my instructor. The first mock, I admit I was very tired by the end of and not particularly flying well. It was a hot day, and I didn't realise quite how demanding a skills test is, going from navigation to upper air work and then into the most bumpy, hot, gruelling session of circuits. The next morning, we did some more circuits with a big improvement, and then had an hour left (39/40 hours), where we

decided to fly to see the sea. I had some time under the hood over Lincolnshire where I heard my first ever Pan-Pan call. We looked at each other a little startled and then I started writing down about Prefect 63's fuel pump warning light, ready to transmit on their behalf if required.

A few days later came skills test day. Although I was reasonably stressed, and stumbled on a couple of theory questions like LARS heights and what the 'U' in Sywell's 'TU'



marking stands for ('Unusual', rather fittingly), the test itself was one of my best flying performances to date. I was a little fast on one of my base legs, and lost 50 ft in a steep turn, but that's feedback I'm happy to accept.



Future Plans

It's been the most enjoyable summer of my life, granted, very hard work, completing the PPL alongside my studies and other commitments, but I want to thank the Air Pilots, SkyDemon, and all the kind, friendly, helpful faces I've met along the way. I'm pleased to say recently my license has arrived, and I have taken my girlfriend as my first passenger and am now looking at hour building over the coming months. It's an amazing opportunity which I am fortunate enough to have received and aspire to give back to the Air Pilots and wider aviation community with my time, and other resources, especially as I move through my professional aviation career.

