

Zain Mumtaz -RAFCT Scholarship

I was immensely privileged to be awarded a gliding scholarship with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, which I completed at the Cotswold Gliding Club. The course was both technically challenging and deeply rewarding, providing me with my first structured exposure to soaring flight and a solid foundation in airmanship.

My early flying experience was in the **DG-500**, a high-performance two-seat glider with retractable undercarriage. From the outset, I learned the importance of thorough **pre-flight and post-flight inspections**, which ensured that I became familiar with the aircraft's systems, control surfaces, and safety checks. Mastering the retractable landing gear added an additional level of complexity, requiring disciplined checks during downwind and final approach. I later transitioned to the **ASK 21**, which, unlike the DG-500, has a fixed undercarriage. This comparison between aircraft types was invaluable in appreciating the design trade-offs between performance and simplicity.



and landings independently.

My initial flights were conducted via **aerotow**, where I was able to take control of the glider shortly after take-off, flying on tow up to release altitude. This provided excellent practice in maintaining position relative to the tug aircraft. Once released, I progressed through a structured syllabus of **upper-air handling**, including coordinated turns, stall recognition and recovery, and circuit planning. As my training developed, I was entrusted with controlling the ground roll on launch, refining my circuit judgement, and eventually carrying out full approaches



I was also fortunate to experience **winch launching**, which provided a completely different challenge. The rapid acceleration and steep climb required precise control inputs, and I was able to take control of the glider immediately after release. On the ground, I even had the opportunity to work in the **ATC tower**, learning how to signal the winch driver with commands such as “take up slack”

and “all out,” which gave me a broader understanding of launch coordination and ground operations.

When not flying, I actively assisted in the **ground handling of gliders**, which included wing-running during launches to keep the aircraft level, and positioning gliders on the launch point. These tasks emphasised the teamwork essential to safe and efficient gliding operations, as well as reinforcing my understanding of airflow over the controls during the critical ground roll phase.

Towards the end of the course, I was introduced to basic **aerobatics** in the ASK 21. Under instruction, I carried out loops and chandelles, taking control throughout each manoeuvre. This was both technically demanding and exhilarating, and it provided me with a real appreciation of the glider’s performance envelope.

Overall, the scholarship was an outstanding experience. It allowed me to develop both practical flying skills and essential airmanship, while also gaining exposure to the wider aspects of gliding operations - from launch coordination to ground handling. The variety of aircraft I flew, the contrast between aerotow and winch launching, and the progression from basic handling to aerobatics made the course both comprehensive and inspiring.

I am sincerely grateful to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for awarding me this scholarship, and to the Cotswold Gliding Club for their expert instruction, guidance, and encouragement. This experience has only strengthened my determination to pursue a future in aviation, and I will carry forward the knowledge and skills I gained with great enthusiasm.

