

Thomas Sutton

The Stelios Philanthropic Foundation Scholarship



Me holding the controls of a Jet2 737 at Fuerteventura.

From a young age I have been fascinated by all things aviation. I cannot pinpoint the exact moment I found this passion, but I expect it stemmed from my father and grandfather and their shared interest for all things mechanical. After a childhood of helping dad tinker with the cars to driving my grandad's model trains, aircraft always fascinated me the most. However, with no family connections to the aviation industry and the considerable cost of becoming a Pilot, I was unsure of how to start the pursuit of my ambition.

My journey with The Honourable Company of Air Pilots (Air Pilots) began in January 2025, when I read a bulletin post from my Air Training Corps squadron advertising the gliding scholarships offered by the Air Pilots. After successfully completing my week-long gliding scholarship at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club (DLGC), I knew I had to apply for the PPL scholarships offered by the Air Pilots. On my last day at DLGC I met Martin and Claire, two pilots and representatives of the Air Pilots who had come to present us with our certificates. They also offered us advice and encouragement for applying for the PPL Scholarships.



A week of gliding in the Peak District.

Later that year I applied for the opportunity. After submitting my written application, I made it through to the next stage, which involved submitting a short video, introducing myself and my ambitions. After this, I was delighted to learn that I had been invited for an interview at the Air Pilots House in London. I then started preparing my plan, which would be discussed in the interview. In order to prepare this training plan, I visited Tatenhill Aviation, where the Airfield Operations Manager, Kyle, was incredibly helpful. I also prepared for the questions I expected to face, as well as the history of the Air Pilots. As the interview day approached, I felt nervous, but quietly confident. After arriving at the Air Pilots House, I was put at ease by the hospitality of the staff and former scholars, who explained the structure of the interview process. After completing the group exercise it was my turn for the interview panel. Whilst the nerves were high at the beginning of the interview, I soon relaxed after it turned into more of a discussion of my previous experiences and my ambitions. A week later, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a phone call from one of my interviewers, who informed me that I had been successful. A strange mix of shock and excitement came over me as I told my family the news.



Tatenhill Airfield from the air!

After completing my final A-Level exam, I commenced my PPL training on the 30th of June at Tatenhill Airfield in the Cessna 152. This was my first experience of piloting a light aircraft and the similarities to a glider were remarkable. It was also my first experience of observing the Staffordshire landscape from above, an area which was previously alien to me.

The gap between my first and second lesson was one week. This is where I encountered the main obstacle to flight training – poor weather. However, in order to make the most of this time, I put my time to learning the content for the 9 CAA e-Exams.

The month of July was incredibly busy, as I capitalised on the great weather and started learning the foundations of piloting, including (30°) medium level turns, descending/climbing turns and straight and level flight and stall/spin awareness. After this I moved onto the circuit, which was more tiring than I initially thought it would be. All this work paid off when on the 16th July I completed my first solo flight. The rest of this month was spent learning the flapless and glide circuit, as well as the advanced turns and Practiced Forced Landing (PFL) before starting navigation on the 31st of July. As well as my practical flight training, I also passed my 9 exams first time during this period. Overall, I flew a total of 25 hours and 5 minutes in July.



Early photo from my flight training.

The navigation phase of training brought excitement as I could leave the local vicinity and travel across the country. Navigation training also involved the use of VHF Omnidirectional Range (VOR) and an hour of Instrument Flying, which was one of my favourite lessons due to the surreal sensation of flying without being able to look out the windscreen. Using the VOR was also quite an interesting experience, as I was informed that it was quite dated technology, but still required in the PPL skills test. I remember stumbling across the Trent VOR on a motorcycle ride with my dad years before. To tune into the Trent VOR while flying was quite a full circle moment.

After learning the principles of dead reckoning and the 1 in 60 rule, I was soon completing dual landaways to Leicester and Gloucester in preparation for my qualifying cross country (QXC). These were great fun as they combined all elements of my training from requesting services from ATSUs to completing circuits at unfamiliar airfields. My final ground exam and perhaps the one I was most nervous for, was the Flight Radio Telephony Operators Licence (FRTOL), which was required before I could complete my QXC. After multiple productive phone calls with my examiner David, I completed my FRTOL on the 24th of August. However, this was the day the weather turned, and bad weather covered the country for the next few weeks.

As the QXC pretty much requires good weather nation-wide I was grounded until the weather improved. On the 5th of September, I finally got a break in the weather. However, due to the LAA rally occurring at Leicester that weekend, I had to re-route to Turweston instead. With the Cessna's tanks filled to the brim, I set off for Turweston excited for the day ahead. Routing via Nuneaton disused and Draycote Reservoir, I arrived at Turweston with views of the Silverstone grandstands.



After parking up next to a Harvard, I enjoyed a slice of cake and cup of tea while revising my next leg to Gloucestershire airport. The next leg to Gloucester provided great scenic views as I flew over the northern Cotswolds.

After double checking my final leg back to Tatenhill, I departed home with the Shropshire hills to my left and the skyscrapers of Birmingham to my right.



The QXC was my favourite part of PPL training. It encompassed all elements of flying and it was a magical feeling to be flying across the country all by myself.

After completing my QXC, the final phase of my training was the skills test preparation. During this phase I completed two hours of revision, revisiting circuits and the upper airwork, such as PFLs and Stalling. After this came a nervous wait for my skills test due to a dodgy weather forecast and little examiner availability. After a slot on Saturday the 12th was cancelled due to the weather, I was delighted when I received a call from my examiner, informing me that there was availability for the next day due to a cancellation. Like most of the past few weeks, I was constantly checking MAVIS. After driving to



Tatenhill in the rain on the morning of my test, I was optimistic that the rain would pass and that the cloud base would rise. However, as my test was scheduled for 11am, it wasn't going to be feasible. Luckily, after managing to get a swap back to 1pm I was able to fly after all. After completing all the required sections in a two-hour flight, I was relieved and excited to learn that I had passed.

Reflecting over this summer, I feel proud and honoured to have achieved my PPL(A) through this opportunity. The Air Pilots scholarships have not only taught me how to fly an aircraft from scratch, but have also developed my character, whether that was building confidence after my first solo or demonstrating resilience when things weren't going to plan.

This scholarship has allowed me to enter the world of aviation and turn my ambition into a reality. I feel proud to have The Honourable Company of Air Pilots written on my CV and I am very grateful to them and The Stelios Philanthropic Foundation for giving me this opportunity and believing in my potential. I believe that this opportunity will open doors for my goal of becoming a commercial pilot.

Thank you to my mentor Piers. You have been more helpful than words could describe. Without your advice and support I know I wouldn't have been able to complete my PPL as efficiently as I did.

I would also like to thank the instructors and staff at Tatenhill Aviation, particularly Colin, Joe, Paul and Kyle for all their help and time. I look forward to building more hours with you.

Finally, thank you to all my close family, who have supported me over this summer, I look forward to taking you flying!

Thank you all again,
Thomas Sutton