

The AST Gliding Scholarship at The Midlands Gliding Club

Tom Leviss

I was never sure if a normal person like me would ever be able to reach the skies until I heard a friend casually mentioned he wanted to be a pilot. This made me consider for the first time, “If he could do it, why can’t I?”. Ever since, the idea of becoming a pilot was all I could aspire to – so naturally I started to figure out how. My search didn’t take me long until I discovered the cheaper way of flying. Gliding captivated me from the moment I launched in my brief glider flight with the air cadets. My search continued until I found gliding scholarships to which I hastily applied. With a 2 for 2 or 100% success rate in my interviews now secured I took to the skies thanks to HCAP and The Midland Gliding Club.



The 5 day week started the evening before, slightly later than planned for me due to the postcode taking us up the wrong side of the moorland plateau. I quickly found the other scholars on the course and introduced myself to them. We all had similar aspirations and experiences so bonded quickly over the ease of a warm roast dinner.



The gliders we used were ASK-21s; these I have learned are the go to glider for students and instructors due to their reliable and forgiving handling. The first day of flying was exhilarating with the launch keeping my breath in. A few more flights in the morning allowed me to learn about how the glider is controlled and soon I started to control the glider in the air and grew to love the thrill of flight. As the afternoon warmed up the thermals grew stronger that was when I had my first real taste of a soaring flight. At one point we gained 3000ft in one thermal whilst catching the tail of a second glider. I started to grow more used to the sensations provided by turbulent, thermals and sink which led the instructor to offer me the chance to do a loop. Just after I eagerly accepted, the nose pitched down as though we were set to crash and then pulled up when we had enough speed. The canopy went blue and then golden as we inverted and the wheat fields were presented for examination.



Unluckily, the second day yielded, in gliding terms – a cloud base lower than we were – or in normal words. Fog. Because the club is elevated on a plateau, the clouds were more likely to affect the flying than other places - this was the trade off of having such great views and ridge lift. The typical weather didn't stop us learning a great deal about circuit patterns, approaches, landings and launches. We learned how to use the simulator, played a few uno games and all went for an evening walk. Even though everyone was grounded, we still had a great day.

Though nothing was as good as the first days conditions, we still flew all the other days. For me, I wanted to practise circuits and approaches/landings as those seemed like the most technical areas as the days and flights went on, I grew better and better. Soon my instructor Sam was letting me fly the top of the launches too. By the end of the 4th day (3rd of flying). I was allowed to fly the full flight – from launch to landing with the instructor in the backseat. To know that I had done that by my self was an amazing feeling that continued throughout our last day of flying. Other things I enjoyed doing were herding the sheep off the runways, driving the retrieval winch and wing running with the launching gliders.

Overall I had the best experience of my life, made new friends and have gained some amazing experience in the air that will not only help me achieve my dream of becoming a pilot but also has introduced me to the sport of gliding. My next steps will be to get my driving license so I can then join a gliding club nearer to me.

