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SOLO WHAT NEXT?

AFTER YOUR FIRST SOLO

That first solo is a big step on the way to becoming an accomplished glider pilot, but you may be wondering what the next steps are.

Do you remember when you learnt to drive? The excitement and trepidation the first time you went out on your own after passing your test? The nervous feeling when you got into a different car for the first time? Then your first trip away from the roads and streets of your home town that you knew so well?

Learning to glide is very similar. Congratulations on passing your test and going solo, but that's only the beginning of a much bigger adventure just as passing your driving test was when you really started learning to drive.

However, unlike driving there is a bit more formality in how you progress, you can't for example jump into a new glider with a passenger and go cross country right away. That doesn't stop you having fun along the way as you will find.

Ok, so what do you do next?

- improve your basic flying skills
- learn to fly new gliders
- experience flying in different conditions and from different locations
- learn how to read the weather and how to soar
- and use all these new skills to fly away from the airfield

For a while once you are solo, you will have a check flight with an instructor before you fly alone, to ensure that you can deal with the conditions that day and that your flying is up to scratch. Don't worry if sometimes you don't get to fly solo. As with all learning there will be times when you feel as if you are not getting anywhere, it happens to everyone. And if it's a bit rough or there's a cross wind, flying with an instructor will give you the confidence to deal with difficult conditions. Set yourself a target for each flight – better speed control, perfect turns, landing where you planned. Use your log book to make notes on each flight and how you dealt with it.

BRONZE BADGE

The first qualification is the Bronze badge, and then the Cross Country endorsement. The requirements for Bronze are set out in Laws and Rules, but may be summarised as:

- safe and accurate flying
- being able to stay up
- passing the Bronze paper

You will need to study for the Bronze paper, there is a range of books in the office to help with self study, and a test program on the briefing room computer. If you need help with any aspect ask an instructor. On Saturdays during the winter there are lectures on meteorology, air law, navigation and other topics, and finally an opportunity for you to take the Bronze papers. Check the clubhouse noticeboard for the full programme. Bear in mind that you have to complete all the Bronze requirements within 12 months, so you may be out of time if you wait until the spring to take the paper.

To prepare for the Bronze General Flying Test, fly with an instructor or book instruction the motor glider and try navigation and simulated field landings.

AUTUMN SOLO

Remember that there is still plenty to do over the winter, despite the days being shorter. First of all, enjoy the scenery as it changes with the season and the light. After all, the main reason for gliding is to have fun. On the first Saturday of every month there is an aerobatics course suitable for all levels, which is excellent fun as well as being very good for your general flying. And every Saturday there is a lecture on a topic from the Bronze paper.

Keep yourself current by flying regularly, at least every couple of weeks, this will also help you to build up the hours and launches necessary for your Bronze. If you put in enough practice you should be able to move on from K13s and K21s onto the K18 and Junior.

And get the next season off to a good start with the Club expedition to Shobdon (Herefordshire GC). Flying from a different site will sharpen up your circuit planning. It's also an excellent opportunity to get to know your fellow club members – very important when you're looking for a retrieve crew for cross country flights - as well as trying out thermal, ridge and maybe wave soaring over beautiful countryside.

SPRING SOLO

You will have lengthening days and better weather to look forward to and should have the opportunity to build hours and launches for your Bronze. Try to fly regularly in order to stay current and maintain progress, at least every couple of weeks. You should aim to work through the fleet from K13s and K21s onto the K18 and Junior. Be prepared for longer flights as you get better at staying up, make sure you have a hat and sunscreen, and invest in a water system like Camelbak. Ask for a cross country flight in the Duo Discus and see how the world looks from beyond the ridge.

And finish the thermal season by joining the Club expedition to Aboyne (Deeside GC) to learn about wave flying – at last a chance to get above cloudbase and gain height without having to go round in circles. A new adventure in and over wonderful scenery, but most importantly you go away with flying acquaintances and come back with friends.

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

When you learnt to drive, you were probably keen to get your own car, something fast and sporty, as soon as possible. Rushing to buy the latest hot ship is not necessarily the best thing for your gliding progress. Obviously you want to fly solo as much as possible, especially once you are 'off checks' and no longer need a check flight before each solo. But the club has a large fleet and you will learn a great deal by flying different types of single seater, and also by flying two seaters with an instructor. This will all be useful to you if and when you decide to buy your own glider, or a share in one.

Try different aspects of flying, decide what interests you – cross country, competitions, expeditions, aerobatics, instructing – set yourself targets, but the most important target of all is to enjoy yourself.