



# ‘ROYAL’ SEAL OF APPROVAL FOR LAA

This month we talk to Ajay Prince, one of our younger members who has recently bought a share in a Jodel

**W**elcome Ajay, can you tell us something about your career to date?

I am a freelance IT consultant working primarily on software for banks. I did my schooling in India, followed by a Bachelor of Engineering in electrical and electronics engineering in Malaysia. I then did my Masters in microsystems at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. Subsequently, I returned to India to work for an Icelandic IT company which, after an initial stint in India, offered me a chance to work in Iceland for a couple of years, following which I was offered the opportunity to move to the UK.

## What started your interest in aviation?

My grandfather, who was in the Indian Air Force, introduced me to flying. When I was five years old, he let me sit in a parked MIG fighter at the Sulur Air Force base in the south of India. My grandfather spent over 34 years in the Indian Air Force, serving all over India. He was a weapons fitter – primarily fitting missiles in MIGs and GNATs among other aircraft.

**Main** Ajay Prince with the Jodel D112, G-INNI, which he shares and flies from Kent.

Ever since then I wanted to get into flying but my education and career took a different path, primarily involved in engineering and IT.

Then, while working in Iceland, I got to meet an Indian Air Force pilot who was flying around the world in a CTSW microlight in an attempt to break the world record. That meeting kicked off old memories and I signed up for a PPL at a flight school in Reykjavik the following week. Learning to fly in Iceland was a great experience – very different from the busy airspace in south-east England where I now fly from.

## In what, where and when was your first flight?

My first training flight, which was a trial flight, was in C152 TF-FHI in Reykjavik. I got on well with the instructor and decided to do my PPL there. He was a professional instructor whose name was Gunnar Thorarensen at Flugskoli Helga Jonssonar in Reykjavik primarily on C152s. He is now a pilot at IcelandAir.

## How did you hear about the LAA?

I was flying C152s from a flying club at Biggin Hill for a couple of years after I revalidated my licence in the UK. I was looking for ways to fly more economically when

I came across the LAA and was fascinated by the versatility and running costs of types such as the Jodel. I have been a member since April 2017.

### Has the Association helped you meet your aims?

The LAA has helped in owning and operating an aircraft economically. We were lucky to get a fantastic LAA inspector who painstakingly helped us find a good Jodel. He is also a coach and subsequently, through the LAA coaching system, I learnt to fly the Jodel with him.

To learn in such an informal setting – from a grass airfield, on a vintage plane and from a great instructor – was very different compared to flying from the controlled airports I had been used to, making it a very special experience. I thank the LAA for making all of this possible.

### What made you choose a Jodel?

As a newish pilot, I was looking for an aircraft that was similar to the C152 in terms of mission, which mostly involved one to two-hour flights with the occasional longer trip. Unable to afford the annual costs for CAA types, I was set on looking at a suitable LAA aeroplane.

Jodels, especially the DR1050 and the D120, seemed to tick a lot of boxes. The clever wings translate into good cruise speeds and good load carrying capability with fairly small engines. In the end, we went for an A65 powered D112 that was able to do two to three-hour trips with two medium-sized pilots. This particular example was once owned by our inspector. The Jodel is a simple aircraft and has proved to be affordable to maintain so far.

### How did you get on converting to a taildragger?

Having previously flown only the C152 and occasionally the C172, the first few lessons were eye opening, to say the least. It was like learning to fly again. Simple taxiing on the taildragger was not straightforward and taking off was a three-step procedure that involved raising the tail,

getting to the right speed and pulling on the elevator a touch to run parallel to the runway to get to the take-off speed of 50kt.

Landing without flaps was a learning experience on its own, compounded by the fact that the aircraft would not go straight after landing – it would try to get into a ground loop with the smallest error. During the first couple of lessons, I almost convinced myself it was going to be impossible to learn to fly this plane! However, I kept hearing from other taildragger pilots, who had watched me during my training, that it would all become second nature at some point. Some four or five lessons later, it all seemed to come together.

### Would you recommend other pilots go the LAA route?

For anyone who is not able to afford hiring an aircraft and wants to expand their horizons, I would seriously recommend buying a share in an LAA type. Your money certainly goes farther.

I have limited experience, just 135 hours in the 152, a couple in the 172 and 80 in the Jodel. I see pros and cons for each aircraft. Of the three the C152 is the easiest to learn in.

However, it and the 172, do not teach you to use the rudder effectively. Also, the visibility is comparable to looking out of a letter box, as it is also hindered by the high wings.

**Right** Ajay's grandfather (right) served in the Indian Air Force and was instrumental in forging Ajay's interest in aviation.

**Below** Reykjavik Domestic Airport, where Ajay learned to fly on the C152 while he was working in Iceland.





The Jodel is a more enjoyable aircraft to fly although it requires more skill, but in turn that makes you a better pilot. Drawing a parallel with photography, the Cessna is like using the auto mode on the camera and the Jodel is like taking the same photo in manual mode – a little more skill is required but you get a greater sense of satisfaction.

### Do you have a best aviation moment?

My first solo was obviously quite an exciting moment. The CFI did a quick circuit with me and then decided it was time for me to go on my own. First time alone in the Jodel was a similar experience.

### Any aviation heroes?

Apart from the Wright brothers, Bleriot and the pioneers of aviation, Frank Whittle comes to mind as someone who has changed the face of aviation.

### Have you experienced any worrying moments?

This reminds me of the saying 'hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror'. My first such experience was when I took my PPL skills test in Iceland. I took off with the examiner in a newly refurbished Cessna 152 that had been sitting for a few weeks. During take-off, a few hundred feet off the ground, the engine sputtered and died. Being inexperienced, I pulled on the controls trying to hang on for dear life. The examiner, an experienced former Icelandair airline pilot in his eighties, calmly took over the controls and pointed it towards the beach ahead as we didn't have enough height to turn back. Luckily for us, a couple of tries on the starter brought the engine back to life and we landed safely to continue the test on another aircraft.

It was suspected there was water in the fuel that had condensed over time when the fuel tank was half empty.

Another instance, while flying the 152 with my wife for the first time from Biggin Hill, my

door opened on take-off. I managed to close my door again while my startled wife had to take over the controls for a few moments.

More recently, in the Jodel, when taking a friend up for the first time to Henstridge, the canopy on his side came open and trying to close it caused some additional damage to the hinge that keeps the canopy open. The people at Henstridge very kindly fixed the broken bits to help us get back home safely – the LAA is a very friendly and helpful community that passes on knowledge and assistance.

These moments remind one to focus on the priority of various aspects of flying, i.e. Aviate, Navigate and Communicate in that order and most importantly, keep the aircraft flying no matter what the in-flight emergency is.

### Would you like to go touring?

This is something that has been on the back of my mind since I got my PPL. I have only been as far as Le Touquet but I would like to fly to Scotland and Venice-Lido this year or next. If time allows, I would love to plan a flight to India.

### Do you have any other hobbies?

I love travelling, fishing, cycling and experimenting with new recipes – I built a wood-fired pizza oven from scratch this summer.

### What aircraft or vehicles are on your wish list?

I would love to own or operate a DA42 Twin Star for touring and an Extra 300 for aerobatics at some point. I would also like to own a bike engine powered kit car for sheer thrills on the road.

### Any advice for fellow pilots?

I would advise most cost-constrained pilots to consider LAA types. Flying at least once a month to keep current is also a good idea. ■

**Below** Ajay trying his hand at gliding, for now though he wants to do some European touring.

