

Coaching Corner...

This month PCS National Coach, **Chris Thompson**, explains the role of the coach and how they can help keep you safe...



Above Chris Thompson, LAA's National Chief Coach

Welcome to my first article since taking over this illustrious task from Will Greenwood – I'm sure I echo the thanks of us all for everything Will has done in the post over the last 10 years.

With my limited seven years of instructor knowledge, compared to some of our coaches, I was quite surprised to be approached to take this on and the words of my taskmaster (Jon Cooke, who originally taught me my CRI) instantly sprang to mind: "You should know this!"

I therefore began by investigating all the available operational information available to members on the LAA website – there really is a great deal of data on there, both for the members and the coaches.

As my role will be looking after the LAA Coaching section, I also researched what the actual job specification would (should) entail. I do not see any hierarchy in this post. Nobody 'reports' to me, and I want to operate on the same level as the coaches, and be available to assist all members, if only to try to point someone in the right direction. In simple terms, I see it as coordinating any course or coaching requests, whether coming directly from our own coaches or those passed from enquiries to LAA HQ. These requests can be very varied, and while some are quickly resolved, sometimes the simplest query turns out to be very complicated – a recent query turned into many hours of work between the aircraft owner, LAA Engineering, and myself.

Your coaches are a very experienced group of people,

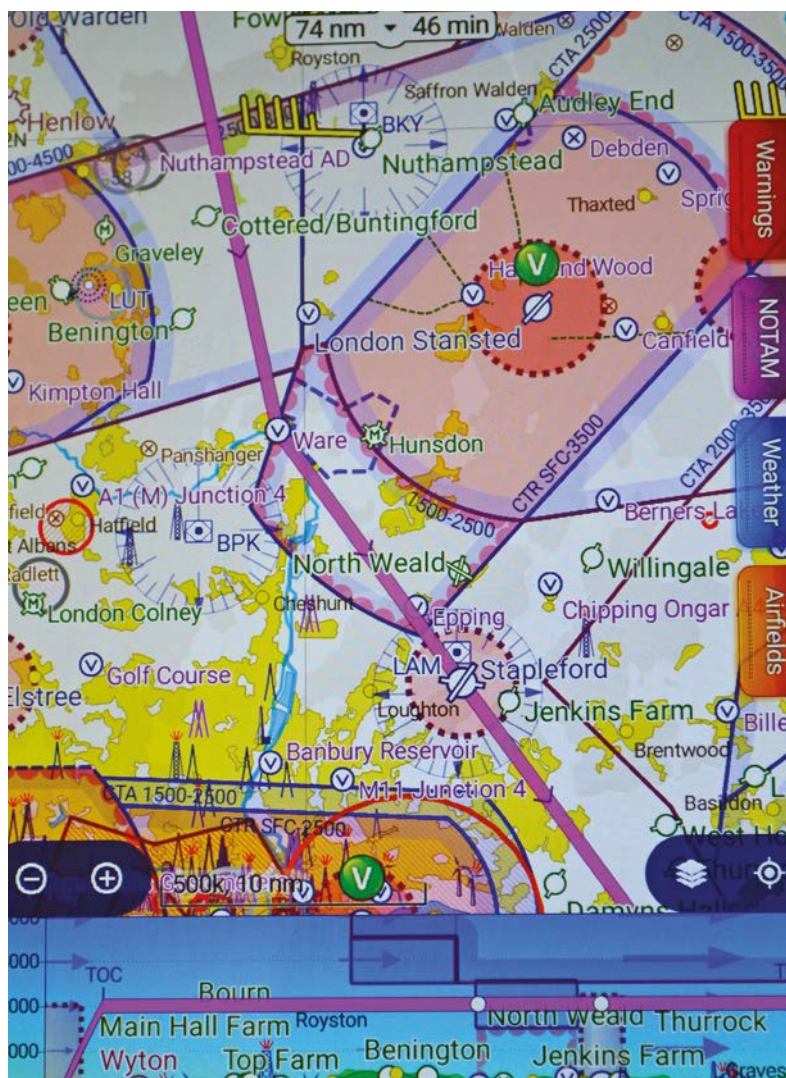
with some quarter-of-a-million hours of flight time between them, all holding at least 'R' Examiner status. All are at least Class Rating Instructors, many are Flying Instructors, and some are Flying Instructor Examiners. They are able to give you real insights into your flying activities on both EASA and LAA types, as well just carrying out the biennial one-hour flight with an instructor. That 'one-hour' is probably the only time most pilots ever get, as regards what you might call 'instruction' in their two-year validation period.

I have flown with many pilots who seem to dread this revalidation flight because they regard it as a test. This should not be the case. Regulations change all the time and whilst people who operate in a flying school environment may possibly just manage to keep up, there are many of you flying who may have little contact with any updates or airspace notifications.

Instruction and coaching

If instruction can be described as structured and formal, what exactly is coaching? Put simply, coaching is a process that aims to improve performance and focuses on the here and now, rather than on the distant past or future. Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance – it is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

The members that the coaches fly with already have licences, so remember it is purely voluntary for YOU to ask a coach for some additional help, but we are there to be approached! Flying can get tedious and boring if you make



“You will surprise yourself at what you are able to confidently achieve with a little help from an experienced coach”

Left Looks easy from the comfort of the lounge armchair but with airspace starting at 2,500ft once you enter the Luton/Stansted ‘gap’, and lateral borders of down to surface airspace within about five miles either side, not to mention the TMZ from ground 1,500ft from Ware onwards, and then the Stapleford ATZ. You really don’t want your electronics to throw a wobbly. What is your plan B? An independent GPS with the route already planned in, or perhaps a marked-up paper chart and plog. Either is better than blind faith.

the same old round trip on your own in the local area. And the problem is if you do that because you lack the confidence to spread your wings further, the longer you do that the less confident you become. If you are wary of venturing further afield, then please ask a coach to assist you in pushing your boundaries farther out.

That dream trip

What trip did you always want to do but have never achieved it because it was too difficult? Was it that trip to the Channel Isles? Le Touquet for lunch? That long haul and an overnight stay in a local pub? We have magnificent scenery in the UK, why not start collecting a few memories and photographs, just as Martin Ferid has been doing throughout his travels which appear regularly in this magazine.

If you think some of these seem beyond your capabilities, why not take a coach on that longer cross-country, or to learn how to cross that ‘impossible’ airspace that you never go near because it gives you the heebie jeebies. You will surprise yourself at what you are able to confidently achieve with a little help from an experienced coach.

Electronic navigation

The ancient art of navigation is becoming lost with all the new electronic devices – the current navigation process seems to comprise of plotting a line from A to B on your tablet or smartphone, getting in the aircraft, and flying said

aircraft along the pink line. But, do you know how to change this line and divert whilst in flight in bright sunlight, on a touch screen, on a bumpy thermally day? Even if you do, how will you obtain the frequency of the diversion airfield, or are you just going to arrive unannounced and non-radio?

Can you remember basic planning and map reading if the device fails? And, as David Cockburn said last month, if you want to play, and ‘learn’ your electronics in the air, then take a coach or a safety pilot with you so they can fly the aircraft while you are head down in the cockpit. The time to find out that you don’t understand the ins and outs of your navigation app is not when the weather is deteriorating, and you need to divert to an alternate aerodrome.

Get organised

It is a joy to fly with a pilot who is totally organised, and the session has been planned as requested. However, there is still in a world where pilots refuse to talk to anyone on the radio, in case they are asked to do something, and have never heard of a Listening Squawk or a Basic Service. A request to be taken on a short cross-country can result in no planning whatsoever because the pilot ‘knew where their destination was and could just go there anyway’. Your licence is being revalidated for another two years, and once that has been done it will entitle you to fly anywhere – and not just the places you recognise because of the village church spire or railway line! The biennial flight is a must, but remember, it is not defined – why not use it to the

maximum advantage by learning, or relearning, the basics of planning and navigation?

Pilots flew past two by two...

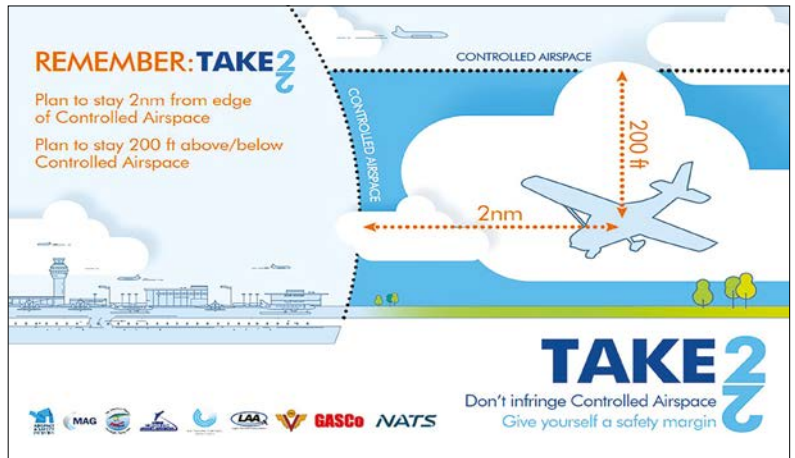
With infringements still excessively high they are certainly on the CAA hit list, if you infringe it is certainly going to spoil your day. It is imperative that you note airspace heights and boundaries on or near your route and plan to either go-around, under, or seek a transit.

The Take 2 initiative is great advice – allow two miles laterally from and 200ft below controlled airspace. It is rather ironic that given the accuracy GPS provides modern navigation, infringements remain a major problem, but part of that problem is because pilots plan to virtually ‘tear along the dotted line’. Why take the chance? Allow yourself a buffer zone so that if you do get distracted, the risk of unintentionally bumping up into airspace or slipping across its border is greatly reduced.

When you are planning to fly, consider what height the sortie is going to be flown at, even if it will be undertaken wholly in uncontrolled airspace. If your chosen flight is stated to be at, say 2,000ft, then set yourself a theoretical ‘controlled airspace’ at 2,200ft. Keep a note of the heights flown and see if you accidentally wander 200ft too high, maybe while looking at things on the ground. It’s easily done, especially if the weather is thermally. Your SkyDemon track replay will soon show any unplanned wanderings.

LAA Coaching Seminar

On a final note, we held a Coaching Seminar at LAA HQ on 8 February and had a good showing of coaches



Above The Take 2 suggestion of remaining clear of airspace you do not intend entering by two miles laterally and 200ft vertically provides a buffer should you get distracted.

attending to listen to talks from David Cockburn, myself, and CAA’s Justin Wilcox (Licensing) and Rob Gratton (Infringement Team). Lively interchanges ensued and a good deal of information was exchanged, helping keep everyone up to date.

Many questions were raised and left us (LAA) several important tasks to be undertaken as we look forward to what I hope will be a busy season for the Association’s Pilot Coaching Scheme.

So, stop putting off doing something about those piloting skills you know need revisiting – get in touch and arrange a coaching session, you know it makes sense!

Fly safe... if there are too many ifs and buts, then don't go, there is always another day. ■

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