

LEARNING TO FLY

Revalidating your licence

By Brian Hope



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(Main) Peter's group moved on to a taildragger, Condor G-AXGS, which it still operates, although Peter returned to live in Kent (Photo: Andy Davey)

(Right) Robin aircraft are synonymous with flight training at Headcorn, the type having been used there for over 40 years



The LAA is a Flying organisation, we enable the affordable ownership and operation of light aircraft. Although we have a very good Pilot Coaching Scheme (PCS) that offers all manner of conversions and difference training, what we don't do is teach our members to fly; if one of them decides to buy or build an LAA aircraft we assume they have taken care of that themselves.

It wasn't always so; in the early days of the ULAA and the PFA, more of our members learned to fly with the Association than ever built aircraft. Members would buy war surplus or pre-war civilian aircraft and form a group, often with an instructor as a member, and they would then learn to fly. These groups were naturally very popular, because you could learn to fly inexpensively; they were in effect not-for-profit clubs and new members could join to learn to fly. Sadly the CAA decided that licensed training organisations were the way to go and regulations were introduced that curtailed the activities of these training groups and directed the would be pilot to a Flying School, the significant costs of establishing such, raising the cost of gaining a PPL accordingly.

There are, however, a number of ways you can learn to fly, and several different licences and ratings you can go for. What this short series of articles sets out to do over the coming months is look at what options are available and give you some idea of how much they might be expected to cost. There certainly are ways you can learn to fly that can save you time, save you money and add to the enjoyment – not necessarily all at the same time admittedly, but to be fair, we don't all want the same style of suit cut from the same bolt of fabric, we just want to end up suitably attired!

Just to be perverse, in this first article we are not actually looking at learning to fly but at a situation many reading this will have found themselves in – regaining your licence after you have let it lapse for a few years. Unfortunately there seems to be some misunderstanding by some instructors and flying schools on this, or perhaps a bit of gold plating, because some pilots are being told that if you lapse for more than five years their exams cease to be valid and they will have to re-sit them. I checked with Jon Cooke, head of the PCS, and he assured me that this is not the case.

The relevant rules are here:

EASA PPL holder: FCL.740, in CAP 804, Section 4, Part H, Subpart 1, page 6 (at the top of the page under paragraph entitled 'renewal') – *training as required plus SEP Proficiency Check.*

UK PPL holder: ANO Schedule 7, which refers you to FCL.740 – *training as required plus SEP Proficiency Check.*

UK NPPL with SSEA rating: ANO Schedule 7, which states *General Flight Test (GFT), or GFT plus oral if over five years.*

The terms NPT and GFT only apply to a NPPL holder. For an EASA licence or UK PPL it's either a Skill Test (initial issue) or Proficiency Check (revalidation or renewal). The profile for a SEP Proficiency Check is stated in Standards Document 14(A) – *navigation*

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leg as appropriate plus general handling.
For a NPPL holder it's a GFT which does not include any navigation.

LAA member Peter Huxley is our first contributor to this series. Despite having previously started a successful group, a move and a change of circumstances meant that flying had to be put onto the back burner for a while. Here he explains getting his licence back.

GETTING BACK INTO THE SADDLE

By Peter Huxley

My interest in flying goes back to a very young age. Even as a small child I was interested in machines of all kinds, cars first, then ships but my interest in aeroplanes wasn't sparked until on one particular family holiday when I saw pleasure flights being offered. I pestered my parents to let me go, as indeed they did, leaving me to wait my turn for a trip in an Auster flying out of Bembridge. It was still a grass aerodrome then, long before Britten-Norman took it over. I climbed into the right-hand seat and watched in awe as we prepared for flight.

That was more than 50 years ago and all I really remember is a brief look out of the window at Bembridge harbour and spending most of the time asking questions of the pilot. Brief though the flight was, perhaps no more than 15 minutes, I was enthralled and so began a life-long love affair with aeroplanes.

Later I joined the ATC and had some measure of opportunity to add to my flying experiences. This included doing some gliding and achieving my first solo in a Cadet Mk III glider. There was enough cadet activity to keep the interest alive, with air experience flying at Manston in Chipmunks and also on annual camps, usually in the station Chipmunk but I also managed flights in things like the Varsity and, on one memorable occasion, a trip in a soon to be time-expired Anson.

Unfortunately, poor eyesight prevented me from having any chance of becoming a professional pilot, and at that time personal finances precluded my paying for flying lessons. That situation continued for some years, although the dream was always there; thankfully the opportunity to learn to fly eventually became a reality with an inheritance.

INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTOR

As I lived near Maidstone, in Kent, I chose to go with Bruce Abbott, an independent instructor at Headcorn. His calm, patient approach was of huge help and whilst not being in any way domineering, made it clear that as far as he was concerned, there is only one way to fly and that is properly. My previous glider flying, although many years previous and confined to circuits, definitely helped as it had taught me the basics of control. Bruce polished those skills and introduced me to the added complications of engine management, navigation and using the radio.

After little more than the minimum hours, I became the pleased as Punch holder of a PPL and started to build my hours – fairly slowly



Peter helped form a new flying group around Cherokee G-AVYR. Having sold it on, it was unfortunately destroyed when another aircraft taxied into it.

(Photo Ray Barber)

group around a Cherokee 140, G-AVYR, based at Compton Abbas. It was a handy sort of machine, easy to fly and a good for hour-building, although not really a 'fun' aeroplane.

Thus after five years we looked for something else, eventually settling on a Rollason Condor, G-AXGS. Within a short period of time all of us were converted (in both senses of the word) onto tailwheel flying.

Fast forward another few years to 2010 and I moved back to Kent, although I am pleased to say the Condor group continues to this day. The trouble from the flying point of view was that being self-employed I had to re-build my business, and unfortunately it was at a time when the country was declining economically, so there was to be a long hiatus in my flying.

During that time I joined the Kent Strut, partly just to keep my interest alive, but helped by the occasional flight with another member. I'd hoped to be able to join a group and re-activate my flying that way, but there were no vacancies available, at least not in a Permit aircraft, so the delay continued and my licence lapsed. Within a couple of years things were looking more hopeful, but in talking to one instructor, I was told that if I didn't re-validate soon I would probably have to take a lot more instruction to regain my licence and I could even lose my UK PPL, and have to resort to one of the new EASA based licences. *(That information was incorrect, see above. Ed.)* I decided my best course of action was to get started on revalidation as soon as possible.

Again being near Headcorn, it was an obvious choice and I was delighted to find that Bruce is still instructing there, so once again I was ministered to by his calm, meticulous direction. Having previously flown the Condor, my choice of mount was one of the Robin DR400s, rather than the Cessna 150 I'd previously used. It was a little more expensive but this time I wasn't going to be flying it for 40+ hours (I hoped!).

A booking was made for the first lesson and even though it was late October and I half expected the weather to cause it to be cancelled, we enjoyed clear skies. The lesson started with general handling, where I discovered I hadn't lost the ability but was very much out of practice. That was followed by stalls in various configurations as well as recovery from a spiral dive, which was something I hadn't done since basic training. A couple of circuits and a touch and go concluded the lesson.

Bruce seemed reasonably pleased at how much I had remembered and I felt pleased too, not only at getting behind the controls

followed by some circuits. Most of the PFLs were done over Romney Marsh, which helps because there are plenty of large, open fields to choose from, if you aren't quite going to reach one there is a good chance of finding an alternate. Again we were both fairly pleased with my progress and I could feel my confidence building.

The next phase was navigation and here I was decidedly rusty. I've never based my flying on use of a GPS, what flying I did had been short trips which required only a basic ability to read the map. This time my navigation was to be properly planned, line on chart, dead reckoning, plotted by headings, timings and waypoints. It was only a short flight but encompassed all the basics of navigation. As we went along, Bruce refreshed my memory of what to look for so that I didn't just dart from one landmark to another – and thankfully we didn't get lost!

I had now done three flights, each around an hour and I was feeling quite happy with my progress. The next lesson was a general revision of handling and proved to be my final hour with Bruce as I was deemed ready for my proficiency check.

TEST TIME

I met my examiner, Andrew Viall who agreed a date for the test but the weather had become decidedly autumnal after that oh-so-long 2014 summer. The day before my flight I rang Andrew to discuss it with him and he suggested we keep the original booking as he was going to be busy anyway later in the week. The pessimism in the forecast proved unfounded; it turned out to be near perfect; the wind wasn't very strong, visibility was good, and the cloud base was about 5000 feet. Andrew made few comments during the flight, as one would hope, even when the PFL didn't go as smoothly as it might have – I did all the right things except make a timely decision on my choice of field. It's not a good idea to just pick one and go for it no matter what, but as you're descending fast there's little time to prevaricate. However, Andrew was pleased enough with my actions and decided I could be trusted to fly without endangering others or myself. He duly signed the paperwork and I am now back in the left-hand seat.

The whole exercise of getting my licence back took a month. It was a pleasant and rewarding experience, and has made me even more determined to get into a syndicate and continue to enjoy the thrill of flight but at a somewhat lower cost. And talking of costs, the hourly rate for the Robin was £178 with instructor, and I took just over four hours to become proficient. The test was an hour and twenty minutes at £128 plus £200 examiner's fee, so the total cost was about £1,200.