

# The Sky's Not the Limit

John Wade

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I arrived in Sydney from New Zealand in 1967 and, being a carpet layer by trade, set up a small carpet retail outlet which I operated with my wife. Luckily in 2003 we sold the premises that we had been working from and prior to my accident I was working from home which lessened the impact on the business. In 2004 whilst scuba diving off the NSW south coast I had decompression sickness (commonly known as 'the bends'). My first prognosis was 12 months in hospital and life in a wheelchair but I have been fortunate to have recovered to the extent that I have with incomplete T7/8 paraplegia. I have enough power in my legs to allow me to do many things that I would not be able to do if I had complete paraplegia. I have not been permitted to resume my scuba diving but I do get back into the water for a bit of snorkelling.

I first heard about Wheelies with Wings (WwW) through Russel Fawcett, a fellow Ambassador for SCI Australia's Teamsafe program, and then found all the details on the notice board at the Moorong Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde in Sydney. The Temora based program is aimed at people with a physical disability who may be able to boost their self confidence by being able to access a low wing aircraft and then to fly the plane with specially fitted hand controls under the supervision of a flying instructor.

I was lucky enough to be accepted into the program in June 2008 along with Russel Fawcett and David Trimmer.

It is the responsibility of participants to find their own way to Temora. The only other requirements are that you go to a flying school and get a letter to verify that you can access a low wing aircraft. You must also have a medical certificate to say that you are not on any medications that would stop you from driving a car. After this it all begins.

The accommodation in Temora was at a very pleasant motel which had easy wheelchair access and was close to town; the local RSL and a couple of pubs that had cheap and tasty meals. We gathered at the motel on the Sunday prior to the course starting where we got to know one another and meet David Clegg, the gentleman who set up and runs WwW.

David is a retired Qantas pilot and has funded the program partially from contributions from Qantas pilots and anywhere else he can raise support. The course is run for three participants over two weeks with the weekend off to do your own thing. All costs for flying and accommodation are fully met. Breakfast and lunch are provided, leaving the evening meal as the only cost to participants.



*Trainees David Trimmer, Russel Fawcett and John Wade with the Roulettes*

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We started the course at the Temora Aero Club on Monday morning where we were first given a lesson on basic aerodynamics before embarking on our first flight. From there we took it in turns to fly, generally two flights each per day with basic flying theory lessons given each morning by our instructor, Graham White.

I had already flown before my accident so for me it was not so different in the cockpit from other planes I had been in. Normally flying an aircraft is done with your hands whether it's by using a wheel or joystick. Once in the air the only action with your legs is for rudder control. When landing you have to brake with your feet. I have had enough recovery since my accident, so I was able to use my legs and did not need to use the hand controls provided.

The course coincides with the quarterly air show held at Temora airfield. We finished our training on the Friday when a lot of planes are flying in—some to view, others to take part in the air show. Temora airfield is home to the Aviation Museum that was set up some years back, an initiative of David Lowy who was an Australian aerobatic champion. All of the planes in the museum are kept in immaculate condition and are all still flying. Most are flown in the air show by a number of pilots including David Lowy who also has donated a large sum of money to help keep the WwW program running.

On Sunday part way through the air show we were all presented with a certificate by David Clegg and David Lowy to say we have completed the Wheelies with Wings Flying Training Course. We then had some photos taken with the two Davids and the Roulettes RAAF Flying Wing who performed that weekend.

To sum it all up, this is an experience of a lifetime and one that can be treasured forever. For those who wish to go further with their flying, this training can be logged and counts as part of your Private Pilots Licence. I can highly recommend the course to anyone who may be interested and suggest you apply through the website [www.wheelieswithwings.com.au](http://www.wheelieswithwings.com.au).



Cockpit controls



Wheelies with Wings is a charitable organisation established to promote the rehabilitation of people with physical disabilities by creating a new horizon of achievement in life. WwW awards scholarships for limited flying training, based on a competitive selection process. Aviation has been chosen because of the discipline required and for the independence and freedom it can give.

The scholarships are named in recognition of the courage, skill and determination of Suzi Duncan, a woman who faced the consequences of childhood polio and became a flying instructor. She initiated the concept of WwW, has invented a hand control to make it possible for people with lower limb disability to fly, and has personally raised significant funds to finance the program. As a qualified instructor, she has given flying training to a number of people with disabilities in recent years.

Courses of two weeks duration are held at Temora airfield which enjoys good weather and little air traffic. Temora is five hours drive south west of Sydney. Participants stay at a wheelchair accessible motel in Temora.

The value of the Suzi Duncan Scholarship is approximately \$7,000 per person and covers up to 20 hours flying training, ground and air instruction and associated publications, plus full board and lodging. The WwW course will not earn you a recognised Private Pilots Licence. However as the instruction is carried out by approved and qualified flying instructors it can be used as the basis for achieving one, if you can fund the further training required.

For more information and to download an application form see [www.wheelieswithwings.com.au](http://www.wheelieswithwings.com.au) or contact Wheelies with Wings through David Clegg, c/- Post Office, Berrima NSW 2577, tel: 02 4877 2772, email: [cleggair@optusnet.com.au](mailto:cleggair@optusnet.com.au).