

Michael Alston Report June 2012

Hi Rob,

The latest trip was a great success, weather was perfect for flying the whole time, but I guess we deserved that after the very poor weather last time.

Day 1 (Thursday) I flew once, and according to Sheldon within half an hr I was back to the level I was at from my previous crack at the Solo Scholarship, so I hit the ground running so to speak.

I think it was this flight that we were told by other aircraft that a whale was just off the beach at Moruya, after taking off we did a couple of low orbits over it and had a good look, it was very large, by itself, cruising slowly northward, interesting (Sheldon later told us that he was able to identify it as a Humpback due to the shape of its fins).

Did some revision in the arvo on a few aeronautical topics (with some tutoring from Sheldon and Michael the visiting flying instructor), then passed the BAK test.

Day 2 I did an hr in the morning, rapidly improving, and really starting to nail down my circuits, and procedures.

In the arvo went up again, so my 3<sup>rd</sup> hr this trip, and around 10th since Suzi Duncan, again practising circuits, at the end he had me fly 2 final, quick approaches, then instructed me to land on 18 and stop, which I did, all the time not suspecting that it was time for me to Solo (for some reason I thought I'd probably be Soloing the next day).

He jumped out and said "Right, now do 1 circuit for me then pick me up" or words to that effect.

I was quite confident that I was ready, and had the skills to do it, especially as I had just done it so many times, however I have to admit my heart started beating harder and the adrenalin kicked in a bit upon the realisation that this was it!

I gave him the thumbs up, and with no misgivings made my call then began my take off run, one thing that was immediately different was that I had never flown the aircraft light (minus passenger) of course, and it was yawing quite a bit more than usual, which took a bit of getting used to.

Also the aircraft climbed much quicker, and its sink rate was reduced, so I had to adjust my circuit to compensate, however I think the fact that I noticed this, and was able to adapt is testament to the fact that I was indeed ready to Solo.

I did a nice circuit, not missing any steps and putting it down neatly, picked up Sheldon and taxied back to the hangar, proud as punch!

Day 3 I flew in the morning, more circuits and other stuff that Sheldon wanted me to improve upon, in the arvo he took my girlfriend Caroline up for a short flight in the Foxy so that she may understand what it was like, after a minor bit of initial fear as they climbed out from 04 over the sea she relaxed, and came down in awe, she loved it!

When the day comes that I am ready to take someone other than an instructor up I won't have to look further than Caro, she can't wait to go up again.

At the airfield an O-1 Birddog was on the aircraft park that day (it is privately owned, and kept at the airfield), Sheldon was going to take it up for a short flight before returning it to its hangar, he asked if I'd like a ride in it, an opportunity which of course I jumped at.

It was great, as the birddog is a very different aircraft than the Foxy, a larger but much older design, despite this still having roughly twice the power to weight ratio.

It was the first tail dragger I have been in, and the first warbird (this aircraft actually served in Vietnam, making it considerably older than !!).

It was fun being able to put both back windows up, and fly with a totally unobstructed view, and the smell of it is completely different to a modern aircraft, it really smelled like a military aircraft.

Sheldon of course did many hrs in this type of aircraft on low level power line inspection flights, so it was good to have a real understanding of the aircraft which my instructor had the majority of his experience in.

Day 4 I flew morning and afternoon, once again "polishing" my skills, and practising crosswind landing technique, which is quite challenging, and also physically and mentally demanding as due to gusts one is constantly fighting to keep the aircraft's heading and attitude correct.

By the end of the day I had racked up around 6.5 hrs in total during the trip, including some 8 solo circuits.

My Pilots Logbook now contains approx. 32 hrs.

I was especially happy with the improvement in my landings (and my judgement surrounding them, including using power to arrest my descent when necessary), my vastly increased situational awareness, in particular in relation to other aircraft operating around me, and the general improvement in my flying skills.

By the last 2 days I was putting in many decent, smooth landings, and I reckon I am ten times the pilot I was before the course.

The whole experience was great, Caroline and I both had an awesome time, and I am very keen to save some cash up and head back down to Moruya to do some more flying when I get the opportunity.

Big thanks to yourself and to WwW for everything, I know it was a considerable investment that was placed on me, I think that according to the doctrine behind it I have now repaid in success that investment.

Regards

Michael