



Gliding: From trial flight to first lessons

Contributed by Jill McCaw

IF YOU'VE become interested in gliding, taken a trial flight and loved it, what happens next? What is involved in learning to fly a glider? Prospective students often ask questions regarding how many hours they need to fly to get to solo. Glider training isn't about hours; it's about competency and your ability to safely control the aircraft. People with power flying experience will have a huge head start over people who have never flown before. The average time to solo for someone with no previous flight experience is approximately 8 hours.

The first thing you have to do is join a gliding club. As a member of a gliding club in New Zealand it will be the CFI's responsibility to ensure that you are safe to fly and the club will see that you receive the training necessary to be a safe pilot.

All NZ gliding clubs are run on a voluntary basis. Membership fees help run the club and the national organisation (Gliding NZ). You'll pay extra to cover the cost of the equipment you use, gliders, tow planes and their fuel. You don't pay your instructor who will be a volunteer club member. Upon joining it won't be long before you become a volunteer something too, as gliding clubs are run by everyone taking their turn to do things to help the operation of the club.

He or she might be a volunteer, but your instructor is fully trained. One of the first things your instructor will do is to ascertain how much experience you already have in flying and what you already know about gliding. On the ground you'll discuss how the aircraft flies, the effects of the controls and what to expect on your first few training flights. When you're ready for your flight the instructor will strap you into the front seat of the training glider and explain the cockpit to you. You'll be given a brief understanding of the instruments and what they are likely to show in flight. You'll be shown and be able to play with the stick and rudder and brake lever. Things not to touch, such as the yellow release knob, should be emphasised.

Sitting in the cockpit of the glider to

become more familiar with the controls can be a useful thing to do while you wait for your instructor or are otherwise passing time on the airfield.

Strapped in and ready

Once you're settled in and ready to fly, the instructor will strap in and run through the take off checks. It will be a few more flights before you are expected to remember them but it doesn't hurt to start



Roger Read briefs student Robert McCaw before an instructional flight.

paying attention. They're a much simpler check than the one power pilots have to use. CB SIFT CBE stands for Controls, Ballast, Straps, Instruments, Trim, Canopy, Brakes, and Eventualities – in the event of rope break/tug failure our options are ??

Once the checks are complete, another club member will help you hook onto the rope from the towplane or the winch. The runner will signal to take up slack and once the rope is taut he signals All Out and you're off. The instructor will fly the tow and explain what he is doing. He may ask you to pull the release knob to let go of the rope at the top of the climb.

There is no engine noise, but there can be quite a lot of sound made by the wind around the aircraft. Once you're familiar with the glider, you'll actually use this sound as a clue as to how fast you're flying.

Depending on the conditions, the instructor will try to get you established in lift and gain a little height to extend your flight time. This will involve turning tightly in a thermal with its core of rising air, or flying along a local ridge facing into wind. In still air conditions there may be no lift available and he'll go straight into giving you a chance at flying and starting to

learn the effects of the controls. If you've flown power planes before you'll find you need to use a lot more rudder than you're used to. With other flight controls, less is definitely more in piloting gliders. It is easy to get pilot induced oscillations that correct themselves completely if you simply let go of the controls. Don't worry, flying a glider will quickly become something you do as automatically as you control your car.

As you progress in your training you'll

do more and more of the flying yourself. You'll need a lot of work on take-off and landings and you'll probably spend a great amount of that eight hours of training doing ten or fifteen minute circuits. With no chance of a go around, landings have to be precise every time. You'll learn how to cope with "eventualities" and you'll start to learn the fun stuff, keeping your glider airborne for longer.

Once you've soloed, and shouted the club in celebration, you'll find you're hooked on the sport. Now you will want to fly further, using your new

found skills in reading the weather to take you where you want to go and get you home again. Physically flying the glider is only the beginning - there is so much more to learn and a great deal of fun to be had along the way.

For more information on learning to fly gliders contact your local club and chat with an instructor. Contact details are listed on the Gliding New Zealand website www.gliding.co.nz. For subscriptions to the national gliding magazine SoaringNZ, email: soaringnz@mccawmedia.co.nz

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