

Cor... I Like the Look of That!

by: Brett Flatters

Geez, not much in the way for trikers in Soaring in Australia. Being a newbie to this sport I was disappointed about the lack of trike articles in this magazine. Then I remembered a famous quote I once read, "Why doesn't somebody do something about it? Then I realised that I was somebody."

So here goes my naïve, first-hand account of my adventures in becoming a trike pilot!

Cor.... I like the look of that!

That's what I thought when I saw the idyllic scene of two trikes soaring over my head in the lush green, hilly paddocks of rural Gingin, Western Australia last May.

I'd tried hang gliding in NSW back in the 80s - brief as it was, I

had managed to soar over some of the cliff tops near Newcastle. When I left this ideal hang gliding region to return to WA it all became but a memory. New job, add a couple of kids and time just flies... you'll understand what I mean if you're a baby boomer too.

Back to my thoughts when I saw those trikes... "Ahh, to be

able to glide anywhere, independent of cliff tops and the eternal search for thermals. After all, it's got a motor on it! It will enable me to go wherever I want, right?"- (My naivety may be showing here.)

OK, now the kids are off my hands and life begins when you're

(Continued on page 2)

XT-912 TUNDRA with MERLIN wing



XT-912 Tundra with Merlin wing over the beach near the Airborne Factory at Redhead, NSW

(Continued from page 1)

40, doesn't it? In my case a little older than that and yep I want another mid-life crisis thingy. (1. Top notch road cycling bike; 2. Long sought after motorbike, or two, which I was never allowed to have in my younger days. (Mum wouldn't let me, now being a parent I can understand this.)

Hmmm, the motorbike of the sky... oh yeah that's definitely me!

I made the call and met up with an instructor. To protect the innocent we shall call him Paul.

"Where do we start?"

"A mandatory introductory flight," he replied.

To which I answered, "Ok, but I know I want to do this, so let's move on."

"No, let's take you up and see what you think first," said Paul in a calm and knowledgeable tone.

Well, taking off from the runway under power and sailing into the elements was exhilarating! I knew it would be! Then we were flying over the beach and along the coastline near the city of Bunbury. "Oh my gosh... can I have a play with the bar control?" Paul

indicated of course, she's all yours. "Geez, this is incredible!"

The rest of this flight was more of the same... SPECTACULAR!

"Ok... Mr Instructor when can we get started for real? Tomorrow?" Well it was three weeks later before we could fly again. The weather conditions just weren't conducive for flying.

The ups and the downs

The day finally came. Idyllic conditions - the sun was shining, not much wind and we were airborne. "Look, you can almost see my house from here." Paul told me there are a number of ways you can put this bird down on the runway. A glide was demonstrated. Ok, that looked easy. Then a quick descent from 300 feet straight down and a big full stop. Arghh, I was told what to expect but mind, brain and stomach didn't agree. A little disorienting to say the least.

My turn in the front seat. Geez, ah... OK, after all that's what I'm here for isn't it?

Taking off was, naturally, under instruction and I was guided to

take us up to 1,000 feet. Ok, I'm not too familiar with reading aircraft instruments in situ, but let's concentrate on doing this right. Head looks up at the scenery, eyes not sure what that funny sensation is. Back down at instruments. Oh gosh, went past 1,000 feet, let's bring this baby back 200 feet. Arghh, look up again and now my brain and stomach aren't agreeing with this new sensation. I advised Paul that I wasn't feeling terribly in control here with my senses. Ever the perfect gentleman he replied, "Don't let it worry you too much. Look out there," he said. "You can see..." he continued, pointing out a number of landmarks for me to focus on as he tried his best to divert my attention away from my motion dilemma.

"Oh dear," it was too late and I was barfing over the side on his lovely XT 912. And I forgot about the mike being right in the way of my stomach contents. I couldn't believe it, he was actually patting me on the shoulder, saying, "You'll be right mate." I continued to spew over those lovely Bunbury beaches and any poor



Paul and Brendan with Brett and his "L" plate

unfortunate soul who must have been thinking, "I don't remember the forecast saying chunky rain."

I feel so sick. I don't want to do this any more. My dreams of flying like an eagle were over in less than 20 minutes.

After landing Paul was kind enough to help me clean my lunch off my jacket and out of his mike and face visor, then explained this was nothing. After all, he had been a primary school teacher and although virtually retired now he reiterated a number of stories of projectile vomiting students he has had over the years. How thoughtful of him, trying to make me feel less humiliated. A true gentleman, especially after my misdemeanor all down the side of his beautiful trike.

After a long, sorry and nauseating journey home, some 200kms, I wondered what I must have been thinking.

After coming to my senses I realised these thoughts of 'no more flying for this land lubber' were only temporary. After a bit of research and discussion with other players in the game I had a plan to take control of the situation. Kwell's and ginger tablets were acquired. Another three long weeks of waiting for favourable conditions went by and my desire for airtime was becoming obsessive.

Finally I was back in the seat and hoping these new remedies were going to conquer brain-eye-stomach conundrum. Yep, they worked! This was fortunate because in the meantime, for various reasons, I had the opportunity to fly with the school's chief instructor, (whom we shall call Brendan), who proceeded to demonstrate what a Wizard wing can really do. Even though the cruise speed is slower, the Edge Classic was put through a couple of manoeuvres and I found out what was possible in skilled hands. While I didn't know what was or wasn't possible, I was impressed, not only with my

new mentor's skill. At the same time I was still worried about spewing in this baby. No need to fear, I found the motion sickness is now under control.

The Regime

I must say, I didn't realise that in my fledgling state this new flying in Microlights was so susceptible to perfect weather conditions. Waiting. Waiting. For the right conditions and on the right days for people to be available. Yep, I have found out that instructors have other lives as well. In this part of the world earning a living from activities other than relying on teaching flying is a necessity.

I now have a new homepage on my computer called <http://www.seabreeze.com.au/graphs/wa2.asp#Bunbury>. I eagerly await the updates at various times through the day to see the forecast open and close flying opportunities. I can't believe I watch a website so intently now. I'm not sure if I like this new obsession. I have found out it can be quite frustrating to see days on end so continuously windy they tease you into seeing the smallest of windows looking like possible opportunities for our next adventure.

Emailing and staying in contact with Paul has also been interesting. He keeps me up to date as well as sending me funny snippets that have nothing to do with flying. What! Can't he see I'm not amused by these continuously windy conditions. Surely he must do something about this! He has a good sense of humour though and makes me smile - after all you would have to, being a teacher and an expert on projectile vomiting.

My New Trike

At the beginning I had been told I would be expected to have a trike of my own by the time I'd be able to reach solo status. Yes, I had figured that would be part of it - owning your own trike. Paul happened to have his old trike available for sale and exclaimed

something like, "You would look great in it!" Wow that was a relief. I thought I might have to try to buy one from a stranger from the other side of the country and have to trust them to sell me something I know very little about. So purchasing one, not too expensive with low hours aircraft to start on, was still a big commitment for me. Nevertheless, I have fallen in love with my Outback 583 Edge Series and with a Streak 2 wing!

I have cleaned it lots when I haven't been able to fly. At least I'm doing something that has to do with flying. I'm getting tired of reading my theory books and it makes a bit of a change. Now I have realised I am really committed to attaining my license.

Still Keen

32 hours and not quite there yet. Yes, I know, the sales pitch had me thinking 15 -20 hours and you would be solo. Maybe for someone who has had some flying experience or naturally athletic at whatever they turn their hand to. Ok, I don't think that I'm that much of a "slow learner", but that's the way it has worked out for me.

Passenger and cross country endorsements still seem a way off yet. I'm starting to land unassisted but without the challengers of adverse conditions and emergency landings so I guess I have a way to go yet, even though I'm told I'm not far off. That's what I like, more encouragement to get over my despondency at still being a newbie. I know we are all still learning no matter how long we have been at it.

To hell with expense - it's my mid-life thingy and I'm loving it! *Brett Flatters, Aircraft located at Bunbury Airport WA*
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P.S. Did I mention I watch Youtube.com now instead of TV. Lots of trike videos to keep me obsessed. Is that healthy?