

# Becoming a Pilot

## Learning to Fly for Career, Business or Pleasure



### Why Do Some of Us Want To or Have To Fly?

Flying is the greatest adventure. It has always been the ultimate dream of mankind, and for our generation it is not only achievable but it is also affordable – and it is accessible for people of all ages and physical attributes.

Flying is by far the most comfortable and scenic way to see this magnificent country, some of which can only be seen or reached by air. Flying changes our outlook on life and the wonderful world around us. To see the world from an aircraft that you, yourself, are flying is an incredible and indelible experience – to also carry family or friends is unforgettable. Flying is within the reach of everyone who strives for it – it is the ultimate expression of freedom in our hectic society.

Flying is affordable. For business or recreation, the costs are competitive with other pursuits and forms of transport. Flying your own aircraft is one of the safest and most convenient ways to travel. You are in control, and you are not vulnerable to security problems, delays or other inconveniences.

Flying is also an effective therapy to relieve the stresses of modern life (potentially cheaper than retail therapy!).

Flying can be a valuable business tool and a fabulous career – civil or military.

Flying is a wonderful learning platform where you can study the atmosphere, weather, geography, geology, physiology, psychology, technology and human nature. I wish all young people could share this adventure.

### What Does a Pilot Do?

The pilot's task is to manage the flight. This is achieved by piloting the aircraft, being aware of its position, being responsible for its progress, talking and listening to air traffic control and other aircraft and monitoring the weather, the systems, passengers and crew. The pilot needs to be in control of the aircraft and in command of the situation. The pilot does not just control the path of the aircraft but ultimately must become a 'pilot in command'.

The pilot is:

- the controller;
- the navigator;
- the communicator;
- the supervisor; and, above all,
- the decision maker (commander).

The pilot controls the flightpath of the aircraft by setting the nose attitude and the power. The pilot checks the flightpath by referring to the flight instruments and navigation aids.

The pilot commands the flight by:

- observing and listening to gather information;
- processing the information;
- using judgement and training to make correct and accurate control inputs; and
- applying self-discipline to set professional standards and to make safe decisions.

### Who Can Become a Pilot?

Our potential to be safe and competent pilots depends on our attributes of:

- knowledge;
- skill; and
- personal qualities.

The demands made on these attributes depend on

the licence level we wish to attain: whether flying is simply for pleasure, commercial reasons or career employment, for local or international operations, in simple or complex aircraft and with a single pilot or a crew of fifteen.

Pilots are licensed for the category of operation:

- Student Pilot Licence (SPL)
- Private Pilot Licence (PPL)
- Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL); and
- Airline Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL).

A pilot is licensed for either fixed-wing aircraft or rotary-wing aircraft (helicopters), but, as you can credit your initial fixed-wing flying towards a helicopter licence and because this is much cheaper, helicopter pilots tend to start the same way as the fixed-wing trainees. Some ultra-light aircraft are approved for training – as are gliders. 'Ratings' are added to the licences – for night flying, for specific multi-engine aircraft, to give flight instruction or for flight under instrument flight conditions (in cloud or rain).

There are also logbook endorsements for seaplanes, aerobatic flight, crop dusting and formation flying. The attributes required for each of these operations

vary. Broadly speaking, anyone with average medical fitness, average physical fitness, average hand-eye coordination and average intelligence can become a pilot – given proper training and self development, and provided you are motivated. Knowledge comes from study, and skills are developed by flight training and flight experience.



**Knowledge.** A pilot develops the knowledge to understand the control of an aircraft, navigation, weather forecasts, radio procedures and rules of the air. This study can be done by attending classes or through home study, correspondence or personal tuition. Many smaller flying schools cannot offer the theory training, so the Aviation Theory Centre has developed a series of manuals and 'kits' to assist trainee pilots at all licence levels. The theory associated with piloting is simple. No complex calculations or analyses are necessary. For

PPL and CPL, a basic knowledge of mathematics and physics is adequate. For ATPL, year 12 standard is adequate.

Most important is a well-developed degree of 'common sense' and a logical approach to simplifying and solving problems. If you can build a model, fix a flat tyre, play computer games, catch and bathe the dog, prepare a three-course meal or give directions to find your house, then you are better equipped than someone with only theoretical skills. Flying is, above all, a practical application of knowledge combined with a range of abilities.

**Skill.** There are the two types of skills:

- control skills; and
- command skills.

Control skills are associated with manipulating the controls and operating the systems.

Command skills relate to anticipation, judgement, discipline and decision making. Both types of skill can be learnt. Some people learn less quickly than others. Some take to flying like a duck to water (or a fledgling bird from the nest).

**Personal Qualities.** More important than any other aspect is your personal make-up, psychologically speaking. If you are good at multi-tasking, or, able to

sort and tackle problems in order of priority, are reliable under stress and able to see the essence of a problem rather than the detail, then you are very well suited to aviation.

Before we leave the subject of pilot qualities, let's discuss two special words. They are:

**attitude** and **airmanship**.

When we discuss the suitability of a person to become a pilot, these words represent the most important attributes.

- **Attitude.** The psychological and emotional attitude of the student, as reflected by your motivation and determination to succeed, is the single most important factor in becoming a pilot and, even more importantly, in becoming an above average pilot.

- **Airmanship.** In its simplest form, airmanship means 'consideration – care, caring and being careful'. Airmanship is about consideration for the aircraft, the crew and the passengers. It is about being careful with the planning, the flying, the loading, the navigation, the operation of the systems and the communications. It is caring about the cleanliness of the aircraft, the tidiness of the cockpit, the image you present, the standard of your uniform, the handling of the baggage, the courtesies and the clarity of the communications. All of these things form airmanship, and our future in the profession of aviation depends on it.

## Opportunities for a Flying Career

### Military Flying

The defence forces offer appointments for trainee pilots, and you should seek current advice from the

local recruiting office. For some, military flying is the greatest adventure in the world, but for others, the lifestyle is not appropriate. Joining the military is a very personal decision. Military flying is very specialised and is not for everyone. Certainly, the training, the pay and the conditions while you are training are exceptional. The aircraft, both fixed wing and rotary wing, are the very latest technology. The camaraderie is unique

### Civil Flying

**Airlines.** The airlines offer occasional, but limited, cadetships at approved schools, although you still have to pay for the training. Contact the airlines for details. Otherwise, each airline requires a minimum number of flying hours and only take experienced pilots. These pilots come from the military, regional airlines and general aviation – after some thousands of hours experience.

**General Aviation.** General Aviation (GA) encompasses all aircraft operations other than Regular Public Transport (RPT), and includes scenic flights, charter flights, night freight and newspaper runs, flying instruction, coastal surveillance, parachute dropping, glider towing, private flying and agricultural flying. General aviation is where most pilots build experience before moving to faster, bigger and more complex aircraft.

The opportunities for employment vary from time to time and from region to region. Generally, if you are prepared to look for the work and relocate if necessary, then something will come up. However, you may have to accept part-time or casual employment to begin with.



Photo: Paul Shire

