

LEAD UP TO FIRST SOLO BY MAURICE WRIGHT

For years I have been an enthusiastic motorcyclist both on the road and on a big capacity trail bike.

Most of my trail riding was through the now fire devastated hills to the north of Latrobe Valley, Glenmaggie to Dargo, Licola, Thompson Dam etc.

All was well with the world until last Queen's Birthday weekend while riding from Sheeppark Flats, near Mansfield, up towards Mr Buller, I came off the bike in the snow and cracked a kneecap on an icy rock. After limping around for a couple of weeks, I came to the conclusion that the old body had taken enough punishment over the years and I hung up my dirt bike boots.

It was then that Tony Niovanni, with whom I had trail ridden for years earlier and also flown with, said to me "Now that you have free Saturdays, why don't you get behind the stick?"

And so it came to pass that I met Anthony Morrison who took me up on a TIF and later said "as a motorcyclist, we'll turn you into a pilot".

I then spent hours listening to Anthony saying "right rudder, right rudder, wings level, keep it balanced, flaps up" so often that I thought he must have had a tape recorder on a permanent play loop hidden somewhere in the aircraft.

We ended up doing circuits galore and I still couldn't get it right.

Anthony obviously knew that it was getting me down and so he said one day, "Instead of circuits, let's go cloud chasing". Afterwards he sneakily smiled and said "now, wasn't that fun?"

I had to agree, grinned and said "you should have been a psychologist".

The circuits gradually improved until he nearly scared me witless when he pulled power at about 300 ft above 21 on take off on one circuit. Recovering in time, I apparently did the right thing and we survived.

On Thursday, March 15, the circuits were getting better, landings weren't quite so hairy and when he again pulled power on one climb out followed by a powerless glide on downwind, I thought "well, that wasn't too bad, what next?"

When next was a reasonable landing on 21, a quick u-turn and back-track on 21 by him and then he jumped out and said "I'm walking back, see you at the hangar after one circuit".

Talk about concentrating!

What I then realised was that Gerard (Meggsy) was doing a run-up in his water bomber and took off after me.

He followed me around the circuit and when I heard him call final 21 about 15 seconds after I did, I thought that if I don't do this right Meggsy will be most displeased at having to go around and will probably chew me and the Jabiru up with that massive radial.

As it turned out he was the first to congratulate me, by radio, on my first solo, as Anthony had given him a one finger indication when he walked past the bomber back to the hanger.

My sincere thanks to Anthony for his patience and encouragement to allow me to take this giant step up the ladder to a PPL; I'm still smiling.

Fly safe
Maurice Wright