

So what do I do now that I have my PPL?

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OFTEN I AM ASKED what a pilot should do once he or she has gained that private pilot's licence, and it is important to make the time to keep your licence current, as well as increase your experience.

Instructors usually don't have the same time to devote to you as during your revision prior to your flight test, as they move onto other students, but don't let them ignore you completely. They still should have an input to your flying in a mentoring role.

At a fly-in last year I observed some landings that clearly demonstrated a lack of currency, and the fact that we were just coming out of winter was not necessarily an excuse. One pilot I spoke to at that event had flown 20 hours in the last year and was feeling uncomfortable with that level of flying. I suggested to him that he assign a certain time each week for his flying.

We all have busy lives, but surely we can find an hour or so a week to go flying, especially having spent so much time learning and studying, or even taken the time to build an aeroplane. Every pilot's circumstances are different, but by assigning, say, each Wednesday at 8 am for two hours, then at least if that doesn't work every single week, the currency is kept under control.

Even flying for half an hour is better than leaving weeks or months between missions. Then if you do have an event to fly away to, or someone special to take flying, you have a better level of currency, comfort and will do a good job for your passengers.

A PPL is a licence to learn, so keep up the skills that you have worked so hard to attain and try new things, obviously under controlled conditions. Often the training leading up to your flight test is pretty intense (and expensive), and the tendency is to get on with the other parts of life that have been neglected over those last days or weeks.

But it is important not to let those hours of practice atrophy, and indeed as time goes by they should improve.

I was fortunate when I got my PPL that I was on a training course for engineering and had a willing bunch of victims who were happy to go flying with me and share the cost. I did quite a few trips from Christchurch to Auckland with these friends, building up my hours while increasing my level of confidence. Also I was able to



Line-up of aeroplanes at Dargaville on a typical Saturday lunchtime. The Dargaville Aero Club hosts a very nice lunch and attracts some great people to share their love of flying.

obtain my Cub rating and tow gliders, another very worthwhile way to gain experience.

Flying on a regular basis, though, preferably once a week at least, keeps your level of currency up while gaining experience.

Strategies that you may find useful to fly regularly are;

- Practise forced landings without power (no passengers) on a regular basis, say once a month. This will make you safer to fly with and benefit you at BFR time.

- Set a regular time each week to fly.
- Build or rebuild an aeroplane, or join an owners' syndicate.

- Join a group of pilots, such as the Northern Aviation Adventure Group (NAAG) to give an excuse to fly: fly-4life@xtra.co.nz

- Find cafés at local aerodromes such as Tauranga, Thames, Mercer, Wharepapa South, Raglan or Ardmore, to name some of the more northerly ones. Dargaville or Turangi Aero Clubs host a lunch/barbecue on regular Saturdays or Sundays throughout the year.

All these places are within 30 minutes' to an hour's flying time from my home base (Te Kowhai) so are relatively inexpensive to fly to. It will give you an excuse to find some friends or family to go flying, and you may fly over areas you haven't been to before and meet new friends.

- Go on club trips, or organise one yourself. This also is a good way to find some people to fly with, either an aeroplane each, or two or three pilots to share the flying and expense. (Make sure each leg has a designated P in C so that there are no arguments!)

I have been on club trips where we had half-a-dozen aircraft, and at each stop we changed seats and/or aircraft, increasing the variety of the flying done and sharing the cost and flying experience.

Club trips don't have to be overnight or week-long North Cape to

Bluff expeditions, but even a day or half-day trip is fun. It's also surprising what tips and tricks you can pick up from other pilots, even pilots at a similar level of experience to your own.

- Take your non-flying friends or work colleagues on short scenic flights, as sharing the cost gives you the ability to fly more if finances are tight. We have the gift of flight, and it is our privilege to share it around whenever possible. Some of your friends may only fly with you around town once, or it may spark some adventures together further afield.

I recently flew with a student on a business trip in a four-seater and filled the other two seats with his employees. They had a great day away from the office, and I am sure it was a great team building exercise. They showed me aspects of the countryside that I hadn't seen before either.

The downside of the trip was the flat battery and flat tailwheel tyre that I had to deal with while they were in town at their destination on business. Oh well, time to spare, go by air!

- Arrange to meet your new friends at mutually beneficial airfields. For example, a pilot from Hamilton and one from Ardmore could meet at Thames for a coffee. If there are spare seats, look around the club or airfield for a passenger, or have a ring around among your mates. It is amazing how many people these days work week-ends and have time off mid week if you must fly then.

- Learn new skills — taildraggers, strip flying, beach landings, mountain flying, new aircraft types, retractable undercarriage, constant speed props, multi-engine, IFR etc. It may be necessary to find operators at airfields away from your home base to find the right aeroplane, but this can also lead to widening your circle of friends and acquaintances.

The SAA sometimes organises training workshops, and I was lucky enough to attend a strip flying work-

shop based at Tauranga one weekend. The SAA had organised two topdressing pilots to give us instruction and mentoring in our own aircraft, and despite being disrupted by weather we explored the ins and outs of three airstrips and the techniques required to safely operate.

The Waikato Chapter also organises the well-patronised Black Sands Fly-in at Raglan each November, and most years we sample beach landings under the watchful eye of a number of experienced pilots who are more than happy to pass on their experience.

Until you actually try a beach landing you don't appreciate all the techniques and visual illusions involved.

- Organise some of your flying friends to meet at an aviation museum or fly to an airshow or fly-in. Places such as Classic Flyers at Tauranga, the RNZAF Museum at Wigram, Warbirds at Ardmore or the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre are well worth the visit and increase your knowledge of our rich aviation history as well.

Airshows are often busy times for the hosting airfield, so make sure that you study the NOTAMS or published procedures before you go, or encourage a more experienced pilot to go with you to help.

Fly-ins such as Black Sands held at Raglan annually or the Tiger Moth Club fly-in at Taumarunui also give a good excuse to fly away to somewhere different. At such events there are always people willing to talk aeroplane and give plenty of advice or hints if needed.

- Take part in club competitions, or some fly-ins include a landing competition on arrival. The Hastings Taildragger meeting, for example, is a good place to try your hand at fun landing and bombing competitions to increase your skills.

As you can see, there are lots of options, which most people should be able to manage from time to time, to increase the enjoyment of your flying and meet new people at new places.

Whether you hire club aeroplanes or have built or own your own, it is much better to maintain a regular flying routine than to suddenly find that you have not flown for a long period. This can then mean a period of dual to get current again, or your flying falls by the wayside.

After all the achievement of gaining your PPL, it seems a shame to give it up. However, don't hesitate to fly with an instructor occasionally to sharpen up your skills, not just at BFR time.



The Bridge Pa taildragger fly-in is a good chance to meet with like-minded pilots, share experiences and pick up some tips. Good fun competitions also increase your flying skills. Despite appearances, a Cub is not compulsory equipment at any of these events!



Black Sands Fly-in, Raglan, is a good chance to increase your skills and experience in a fun and controlled environment.



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"If it belongs on an aircraft we either have it or we can get it!"

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