

> COACHING CORNER: GOING SOLO

# Going it alone

Your first flight in a single-seater doesn't have to be a traumatic experience. Will Greenwood suggests adopting that famous boy scout motto, be prepared!

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PRIOR to WW2, aviation was almost exclusively a rich man's sport. However, the post-war re-establishment of the Permit

to Fly scheme, thanks to the fledgling PFA (then the ULAA), made homebuilt aircraft the working man's ticket into light aviation.

Those early PFA types, principally the Luton Minor, Currie Wot, Taylor Monoplane, Jodel D9 and Turbulent, were all single-seaters of wood construction, usually powered by variations of the VW aero engine. They started many a pilot on the road to affordable aircraft ownership.

I started flying gliders at 16, converted to power at 17 and after a few years flying club aircraft, my introduction to the PFA was a Taylor Mono, G-BDAD. It was affordable, it looked great, and it was mine; my pride of ownership was immense. She had Topsy Nipper cowlings, a non-standard steel sprung undercarriage, a full canopy as opposed to open cockpit, plus an alternator and 720ch radio. And at 6ft zins, I could fit in, close the canopy and go.

Well, not quite, I had no tailwheel experience. Luckily, I had friends at my local airfield, Shoreham, who helped me with tailwheel training on Cubs and Jodels – box ticked!

In the meantime, I gently taxied her around Spilsted Farm, Sussex, and got used to swinging and starting a VW, and yes, I do still have all my fingers! Then someone gave me Cyril Oakins' number; he was the Taylor Mono guru and we had a long chat about the handling and what to expect of the first flight in my new aeroplane.

The day dawned when I could finally fly her. Pre-flight checks done, notes at hand, head in gear and Robert Cole (who had sold G-BDAD to me) swung her for me. I sat there warming the engine and pondering the golden rules that VWs and carburettor ice do not mix, and low airspeed will kill you. No pressure then!

I knew that most single-seat aeroplanes are short-coupled machines and will have a more

sensitive elevator than I was used to, so pilot induced oscillation (PIO) could be a problem. But, by resting my arm on my leg, holding the stick lightly rather than wringing its neck, and controlling the aircraft with a wrist rather than an arm movement, PIO could be eliminated. I had checked the prop clearance, trestling the plane in the correct attitude and sitting in her to see what it should look like with the tail raised. I had adjusted the seat cushions, ensuring I had full and free movement of the controls. I was prepared.

I opened the throttle, the tail gently rose and we climbed to 2000ft, with me concentrating on the airspeed and attitude. I gave a shot of carb heat at 1000ft and was surprised by how much power it robbed from the engine's performance. Finally, in the cruise at 2000ft, I could relax and enjoy the view, and grin insanely to myself before settling in for a fly round and head for the aircraft's new home.

Every 15 minutes, I checked the carburettor heat and engine instruments. I got a feel for the

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aircraft with gentle banks, finding out what effect on trim the various engine settings had, before trying a gentle stall at 2500ft with the engine on a high tick-over. So far no surprises.

The Mono's new home came into view and I circled the windsock to check wind direction and strength: it was straight down 24. OK, back to business, carburettor heat on, throttle back and descend, all standard stuff. I was told to add a little speed for my first landing and try to use smooth inputs of power. Cyril's words echoed around my head, "DO NOT get on the back of the drag curve, and if you feel unhappy go around. If you're unsure, then try an approach and a go-around, hold the plane just off the runway before applying power, remember to put the carburettor heat in and to open the throttle smoothly." All sound advice.

The landing was good, and with a small bump we landed on the grass. Doing as I was told, I made sure I kept her straight using my feet. "It's not over till you've got the aeroplane safely tucked into the hangar."

Taxiing was relatively easy in the Mono; she had heel brakes and a steerable tailwheel.

I had my Taylor Monoplane for two years and I enjoyed every minute with her; we learnt together. I did not try any strong cross-winds until I had become very familiar with her controls and my own limitations. We toured the UK, went to many fly-ins and two PFA rallies, and I even crossed the channel in her, in company with Piper Cub G-BFZB.

With the credit crunch and people looking for ways to get the best bang for their flying buck, single-seat aeroplanes are once again starting to look attractive; but be warned, don't just jump in and hope it all goes well. Get some training. Once you have been coached on your particular steed, these machines will offer you lots of affordable adventure and enjoyment; and group ownership of such types can be incredibly inexpensive.