

HOW TO GET OVER THE NEXT HURDLE

Jon Cooke looks at the learning plateau – the point in their training when students might consider giving up flying – and what we can do to help them get past it



IN instructing terms, it is called a 'learning plateau' where our otherwise fast pace of learning has levelled off. It is different for everyone: the first solo, first navigation exercise, qualifying cross-country, Skills Test, or indeed the ground exams. Once you've been flying for a few years, it's easy to forget how demanding that first hurdle was.

The learning plateau is the point at which students may become disheartened with their progress. They come to understand what they must achieve, and realise the complexity of the task they face. This is a normal part of the learning process, and must be acknowledged as such by the instructor or coach. It is the reason why instructors, coaches and fellow pilots must be there to encourage and support, since the easy option for the student at this stage is to give up flying altogether.

As LAA members, we can be there to offer

support to student pilots, with guidance on how best to overcome this levelling off of learning, and indeed suggest ways to progress. If you're learning to fly, and are looking for guidance and support, your local LAA Strut has members who have been where you are now, and know the challenges you will face.

Whether you are a student pilot, or considering an aircraft purchase, thinking of a tail wheel conversion, completing an IMC rating, or are just mad about aeroplanes, there are LAA members just like you!

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DRIVING FORCE

Motivation is a key factor in learning to fly. This is the driving force behind a student's desire to learn. The LAA has, as one of its visions, the "encouragement and training of recreational pilot skills". This must be a shared vision for all of us, by encouraging and motivating others. We can increase pilots' motivation for wanting to learn by demonstrating what is available once they have jumped the numerous hurdles.

You may have a number of hurdles you still wish to jump yourself. Make a list now of things you wish to achieve with your flying this year, and set about doing it.

The first step might be to talk to someone who has already achieved your aim: maybe attending an LAA Coaching Day, flour bombing, flying across the Channel, aerobatics or air racing will help you to achieve your aim. What about some farm strip flying or learning about maintaining your aircraft?

If you are due for your 'one hour with an



instructor' for licence revalidation, consider what hurdles you might have avoided in the past: visiting a busy airfield with Air Traffic Control, flying into a farm strip, stalling, practice forced landings, short field take-offs and landings, aerobatics, IMC practice, navigation, or whatever else you might have on your list.

Learning doesn't stop at completion of the Private Pilot's Licence. Choosing to own an aircraft is a massive hurdle, which will demand support and guidance from those who are experienced in this area. Motivation is there already, in terms of more flying at a significantly reduced cost.

We, as LAA members, can add to that motivation by showcasing to others the vast range of aircraft, and the wide variety of flying available. Navigating to far-flung destinations is no longer a dream to many – we regularly read of LAA members who take their home-built or vintage aircraft to what are essentially long-haul destinations.

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Flying on a summer evening becomes possible, despite flying clubs being closed. Gyroplanes, microlights, vintage aircraft, kitplanes, tourers, aerobatic aircraft and more are all within the Light Aircraft Association, along with the pilots who fly them.

The Pilot Coaching Scheme is another source of information, guidance and coaching, available exclusively to the LAA member. If you're starting your Private Pilot's Licence, or considering an aircraft purchase, give one of your coaches a call – most are experienced at owning and operating LAA aircraft, and are keen to share their wisdom.

Various courses are available to assist you in

converting onto your new purchase, such as type conversion, tail wheel conversion, strip flying diploma and more.

In the dim and distant past, I took a student through from their first flight to their General Flight Test. Upon completion of their Private Pilot's Licence, we went out for a few celebratory drinks. I was presented with a souvenir of our time together in the form of a book called *A Gift of Wings* by Richard Bach. Inside, was a note from the student thanking me for that precious gift. Once you have been flying for a few years, it is all too easy for us to forget that flying is indeed a gift for which we have worked hard to achieve.

You will have jumped some hurdles already, and may have many more to navigate. Let us remember that sharing our gift with others carries with it a responsibility to ensure that our knowledge and skills are up to date. By motivating others to pursue their love of aviation, you are ultimately handing them a priceless gift: a gift of wings.