

Rusty PPL to MEP/IR - in eighteen months

Inspired to fly again after a long period of absence from GA – and finding huge reward in training on state-of-the-art aircraft

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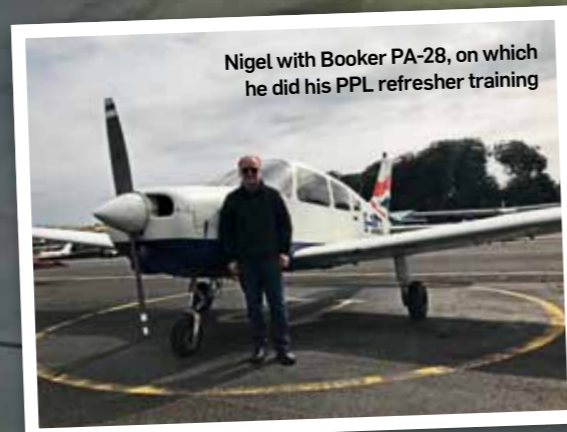
This article is aimed at all those pilots who, for whatever reason, have let their currency slip and/or remain apprehensive at the thought of getting back into the air after what might be a lengthy period absent from flying. Having been in exactly this position, I can only but encourage you to resume your flying again, as few other activities provide such exhilaration, stimulation of mental agility and sheer satisfaction. Furthermore, flight instructors and fellow aviators are there to inspire, making the entire process of getting back in to flying a great deal more comfortable than one might imagine.

In 1983, I flew my first solo in a Cessna 152 and obtained my PPL(A) from Wycombe Air Centre, based at Booker airfield (EGTB). At the time, I was unable to afford even a headset and had to make do with the hand-held Telex microphone and speaker installed in the cockpit, which required quite some dexterity when coming in on final.

For the next thirty years, I was completely engrossed in building up a number of companies, leaving no time at all for any other activities, including flying. After a very demanding career, on call 24/7 for my entire working life, I was extremely fortunate to be in a position to retire at the age of 58, settling in Germany.

Fast forward to 2018 and for my sixtieth birthday, my sister purchased a 'Flight in a Spitfire' gift card. On 29th March 2018 I duly flew in Biggin Hill Heritage Hangar's two-seater MJ267 and the flying experience was simply beyond imagination. Taking the controls was the conduit in getting me back into the air, despite seriously asking myself several times whether I was really up to it, after such a long time.

In April 2018, together with my wife, I attended Aero Friedrichshafen, the largest general aviation show in Europe. With more than 600 exhibitors from 35 nations and 33,000 visitors in attendance, I was simply astonished at the high level of innovation and safety



Nigel with Booker PA-28, on which he did his PPL refresher training

... and close to the goal of the US IR, a DA62 ready for an early morning training flight out of Long Beach



Showroom appeal: AERO visitors try a Diamond twin for size

PHOTO: PHILIP WHITEMAN

packed into light aircraft today. It was here that we came across the spectacular Jet-A1 fuelled, twin-engine Diamond DA62 manufactured in Austria—an all carbon composite airframe incorporating advanced aerodynamics with the latest passive safety technology for high performance, greater efficiency and superior occupant protection.

So, where to start after thirty years? Well, I returned to

Wycombe Air Park to enquire what needed to be done in order to revalidate my CAA PPL(A). By chance, I met with Simon Bone on that day—then a flight instructor with WAC's successor company, Booker Aviation and now a commercial pilot. It was he who took me from rusty pilot to revalidating my PPL(A) in June 2018. I have to admit that I did experience some tough days but, as they say, these are the very

days you really learn all about flying. Simon was extremely professional, gave tremendous encouragement and I will forever remain grateful to him in getting me back up to the competency level required—and this time with a headset!

Prior to commencing my tailored course, which involved flying nearly every day over a three-week period in Booker Aviation's Piper PA-28 aircraft, →

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Overhead Frankfurt, building hours and experience in the single-engined Diamond DA40 NG

I passed my CAA medical and also purchased Pooley's Air Pilot's Manuals 1 to 7 which really assisted greatly in brushing up on the theoretical side.

Armed with my newly validated CAA PPL(A) and with an eye on the Diamond DA62, I needed to have seventy hours Pilot in Command (PIC) prior to undertaking an MEP (Multi-Engine Piston) course. As such, during the summer of 2018 I flew all around Germany and also to Poland and Austria in a single-engined Diamond DA40 NG, experiencing for the first time the truly amazing Garmin G1000 glass cockpit. Being unfamiliar with German airspace, I initially decided to take a safety pilot with me and would encourage everyone to do the same under such



DA40 NG at Frankfurt-Egelsbach. Nigel's travels and hour-building took him as far afield as Austria and Poland

On the flight from Frankfurt to Wroclaw the Diamond DA40 NG consumed just 55 litres...

circumstances. Konrad Michta from Air Alliance was a great companion and the airfields in Germany are truly first class, being very well maintained. Furthermore, the German Flight Information Service's Langen Information provides a really impressive and full service to the general aviation sector. On the flight from Frankfurt-Egelsbach (EDFE) to Wroclaw (EPWR) the Diamond DA40 NG consumed just 55 litres of Jet-A1, still leaving nineteen in reserve – incredibly low consumption!

Living in Germany, I also decided to switch my CAA PPL(A) to an EASA PPL(A) which involved quite a lengthy but successful process. Whilst the CAA radio licence was recognised

for VFR, in Germany there are two radio licence examinations – one for VFR, namely the BZF E and the other required for an Instrument Rating, AZF E. In order to sit for the latter, one must first hold the BZF E licence and I was therefore required to sit both at the Bundesnetzagentur examination centre at Eschborn near Frankfurt, each exam comprising of a theory and oral part. Having said this, I really did brush up on my radio communication skills.

In September 2018, the Diamond DA62 was ordered, with delivery scheduled for the end of February 2019. Being manufactured in Austria, the positioning flight to Germany is only two hours, compared with →



Diamond doesn't just make the DA62 – the Austrian company will also provide owners with specialist training on type



The view of Wiener Neustadt on final during Nigel's DA62 MEP training

My preference was to take an intense, concentrated course

around forty hours, had it been manufactured in the USA.

In January 2019, I attended the Diamond Aircraft Industries GmbH Flight Training Centre in Wiener Neustadt, Austria for a course comprising of the EASA MEP SPA Class Rating plus DA62 Systems training. This, combined with the invaluable in-depth knowledge imparted by Head of Flight Operations and Flight Training Martin Scherrer and his team, was truly exceptional and I would recommend anyone contemplating purchasing an aircraft to train at the manufacturer's own training centre.

Having successfully taken delivery of the DA62 on time and being fully aware of the capabilities

this aircraft affords, it was always my goal to obtain an Instrument Rating. My preference all along, however, was to undertake an intense, concentrated course rather than experience a long, stretched out affair and, having consulted with fellow aviators, I decided to undertake the four-week course at Angel City Flyers in California – one of only two Diamond Brilliance Flight Training Centres in the USA, commencing at the end of October 2019, also obtaining my FAA licence in the process.

In May 2019, I started the process of obtaining US TSA security clearance, undertook my FAA Medical in Germany and also started the theory preparation using the King School's IRA (Instrument Rating, Airplane)

course, comprising of some thirteen hours of video. This course was invaluable as it provided all the background knowledge I needed in readiness for both my FAA theory and oral examination. Prior to arrival in California, I tested my knowledge using the Sheppard Air Q&A software programme.

Overall, the structured learning process enabled me to obtain a 95 per cent pass mark in the FAA Knowledge test. The least number of wrong answers you obtain the better, as these are then followed up during the FAA oral exam. I would strongly recommend getting the FAA Knowledge test out of the way as soon as you arrive in the USA and before starting the practical →

Seduced by the DA62

I never dreamt in a thousand years that one day I would have my own aeroplane but the DA62 is indeed very special and, above all, safe in so many respects. The seven-seat aircraft is based on a 'Formula 1' monocoque, which is stiff and strong enough to provide survival space and protection in case of impact, yet the non-critical structure is allowed to fail to help absorb crash energy. Likewise, the fuel tank is extremely well protected by the fuselage safety cell structure, yet separated from the cockpit, reflecting modern automotive practice.

The digitally-controlled, turbocharged Austro AE330



Jet-A1 fuel piston engines are jet-simple – no manual mixture control, no magneto ignition switches, no manual priming, no propeller control lever, no hard starting – hot or cold, no manual run-up tests, no shock cooling,

no cowl flaps, and no power calculations based on RPM and manifold pressure. Each engine and propeller combination is controlled by a single lever and power settings are displayed as a percentage.

The fully integrated glass-cockpit Garmin G1000 NXi incorporates innovative capabilities into a state-of-the-art avionics' platform. Featuring wireless cockpit connectivity, including wireless database updates, enhanced situational awareness with visual and aural cues, advanced doppler weather radar capabilities, map overlay, traffic alerting, as well as synthetic vision, to name just a few. In fact, everything has been designed on this aircraft to enhance in-flight safety and reduce pilot workload, especially when flying during inclement weather, over inhospitable terrain, water or at night.

flying part, as you are more than pre-occupied with the latter once you get started.

Long Beach (KLGB) and the surrounding Los Angeles area is a very busy airspace with a lot of traffic, fast speaking ATC, all within a relatively small, concentrated area. This really kept me on my toes and if you can handle this then you are pretty well set up for anywhere else in the world. The DA62 from Angel City Flyers performed brilliantly and, after a lot of hand flying, more and more autopilot was gradually introduced. I now know Foreflight and the Garmin G1000 NXi intimately and really feel comfortable with all the respective features. Night flying was also a great experience, where I logged 7.5 hours including thirteen takeoff/landings.

On 21 November 2019, I successfully passed my FAA Multi-engine Land Instrument Airplane oral exam and check ride in the DA62—perhaps the most exacting test I have ever taken in my life! The instruction was nothing short of fabulous. Cary Jones, ACF's CFI was simply superb—cool, calm and collected throughout. Lining up on Runway 30 in between Jet Blue Airbus and Boeing commercial aircraft was also an experience I will never forget, with departures taken in strict order by Long Beach Tower.

Readers based in the USA are indeed very fortunate to have such a pro-GA environment and



ABOVE: **handover of the DA62 – Nigel makes the commissioning flight**

it was an absolute privilege flying in US airspace. My cross-country IFR exercise took me from KLGB to Hayward Executive (KHWD) near San Francisco, to Monterey Regional (KMRY) and back to KLGB—740nm in all—using exactly 265 litres on a ninety per cent power setting, still leaving 57 litres in reserve—amazing!

Following my return from the USA, I undertook the combined oral knowledge test plus check ride, successfully passing my

EASA Instrument Rating. In summary, over the past eighteen months I have flown over 200 hours, including 145 in the DA62, 87 hours IFR and 7.5 hours night flying, visiting 32 different airports in the process. I am a far wiser pilot for this experience and would really like to encourage those rusty pilots thinking of taking flying up again to do so, irrespective of how long ago it has been or what aircraft and level you intend to fly—Go for it!



Angel City Flyers' DA62 at Long Beach



Nigel under IR training, wearing Foggles to simulate IMC