

I joined the DGC early in 1966, soon after the move to Tarrant Rushton airfield. There were a number of new members at that time as the move had created a lot of local interest.

The Club then was run on a semi military basis as two or three of it's instructors were ex ATC or Army and the Club itself still had a military influence since in it's time at Gallows Hill, now Eyres Field, it had formed an association with Bovington camp, and, for a time the Club was known as the Dorset and Bovington Garrison Gliding Club.

Ab-initio's, were expected to be at the gate by 08.00 hrs when the duty instructor would arrive and open the gate. These early arrivals were guaranteed two training flights and were expected to get all the equipment and gliders out and at the launch point ready to fly ASAP.

Gliders were very basic. A T21 side by side two seats with a fitted canopy, a T31 open two seat in tandem, a Tutor solo machine and two Swallows for pilots cleared to aero tow.

We also had use of a privately owned Eagle (a two seat version of the Skylark 3 series) for more advanced training.

In 1968, we purchased one of the first three K13's imported to the UK and an Auster to replace the Tiger Moth which ended it's days upside down in the ploughed field at the side of the runway after the engine failed on a launch when just airborne.

Launching was by direct motor tow which usually resulted in a 500'-600' launch on a good day, or, by aero towbehind our own Tiger Moth. Two of our members developed a method of motor towing with the cable running through an anchored pulley and the car driving towards the launch point and immediately the launch height was doubled with not infrequent launches to 2000'. On a day some years later, I was instructing John Luck in the T21 and he did two consecutive launches to 3200', with the tow car steadily reversing down the runway as we went up like a kite.

Just as now, there was bickering from private owners that they should be allowed to launch whenever they wanted to go, even though they made little or no contribution to setting up or running the launch point. The only time this was allowed was on task weeks and they had one launch. If they timed it wrong and didn't get away, they waited in the queue like everyone else. To be an instructor it was necessary only to have Bronze C and approval of the CFI. As a result, instruction standards varied enormously and there was no continuity of training. Some instructors were brilliant and others appalling. It was the following year before the BGA appointed the first National Coach, John Everett, and work began to standardize training. Soon after his appointment, he ran an instructor course at the Club with the Capstan. I took the week off work and spent much of the time doing some of the routine work for the C of A on one of the Swallows in between helping at the launch point when needed and being permitted to attend some of the course lectures.

John rewarded me for my efforts by giving me a ride in the Capstan. We flew for an hour and did an out and return to Shaftesbury. It was everyday stuff for him, but a real thrill for me. This after all was what real gliding was all about.

After being in the Club for about three months, I took over the job of Secretary and also took over the license for the bar. I spent about an hour every Saturday morning stocking up and cleaning pipes. Yes, we supped some stuff in those days and had some wonderful evenings in the clubhouse, hefty meals and gallons of Badger, music and dancing, yet, somehow, everyone managed to show up for an early start on Sunday.

I also took on the task of producing a regular newsletter for the members and tried to keep them informed about Committee decisions and coming events.

My own progress as a pupil was slow, much worse than average, but, somehow or other, I got

there in the end. I became so despondent at not getting anywhere that I actually gave up for about a month then came back for one last flight.

My instructor took me for a couple of launches and on landing said "What are you waiting for, your Tutor is at the front of the queue".

The Tutor was built for someone of much lesser proportions than my 6'3" and my head was totally unprotected from the airflow. The cockpit was so tiny and not at all comfortable but I wasn't complaining.

Checks completed, I hooked on and was blasted forth into a full climb almost from the ground. What seemed like only seconds later, I back released at about 800' then suddenly realized it was now all up to me. 800' in a Tutor doesn't allow time for messing about so straight into a circuit. Control the speed by attitude, couldn't see the ASI, it probably didn't work anyway. Final turn, hand on spoiler lever which was stuck under my left knee, to operate the spoilers I had to lift my left knee which meant in reality lifting my foot from the pedal, result, a beautiful sideslip, a maneuver I had never done before. Members sitting at the launch point were suddenly running as I hurtled sideways at an alarming rate. I lifted my right foot and all was right with the world once more as the long grass was pinging the fabric to what was in the end a decent landing. It was decided to permit me to do my other two flights in the T31 which had a roomier cockpit.

I did fly the Tutor again but always with the same result so gave it up until several years later I was offered the chance to fly one at Lasham. This had a conversion which put the spoiler lever on the outside and was absolutely perfect. Insurance requirements were a minimum of Silver C and 100 solo hours. I launched to about 1600' and brought it back a couple of hours later, shivering with cold but more than happy. The two things I learned from flying the Tutor were 1/ that it is never a good idea to switch to an unfamiliar glider for a first solo flight & 2/ how to sideslip. It can prove very useful in field landings and crowded launch point situations.

The Tutor suffered a lot of punishment and was frequently in the hangar for repair as may be seen from the photo.

I shall tell you of more of my sometimes hilarious gliding activities at another time.

The quacks won't let me fly any more so I don't get to the field very often. If, however, you do see a lanky old man sitting around, under a floppy hat, please say hello and I might even buy you a cup of tea.

Dennis Neal.