

NOTEBOOKS OF A STUDENT PILOT

(What Now, part II)

The thrill of the first flight is wearing off and the learning of the skills needed to fly safely are practiced and practiced. Take offs and Landings are important, can't fly if you can't take off and land.

Weather was not my friend this spring as several lessons were canceled at the last minute, but pilots don't control the weather, the weather controls the pilot, especially a glider pilot, and the restrictions on the inexperienced student pilot even more so.

I found out about this when club member Bill Thar invited me to fly second seat during a contest at Wurtsboro NY. Crosswinds were a bit high and takeoffs and landing were “tricky”, and this is what I have to learn, but when we were “flying the ridge” (there are three major ways to gain altitude, thermal, wave, and ridge) which is getting the updraft as the wind hits hills and mountains and goes up over them.

I was handed the controls on the ridge and it was a totally different experience from the Thermal soaring I had been learning, kinda strange flying sideways a bit while going straight ahead and climbing. But it was really exciting and got the blood moving, but thank goodness one of the best ridge soaring pilots was in the back seat.

The Wind failed and we only completed about 2/3 of the “tasks” for the day so we didn't get any points for the day but it was really interesting watching and experiencing a truly skilled contest pilot work thermals and ridges where I probably wouldn't have been able to stay in the air.

Later while on a training flight out of Van Sant airport (where we keep one aircraft during the summer) I was getting ready to enter the pattern for landing when I found a really great thermal, instructor said, “you found it, it's yours, work it” round and round I went and climbed and climbed, finally had to stop when I got to the clouds and well, gliders are not licensed to fly in the clouds. But it was the first true climb of over a thousand feet and done entirely without the instructor saying anything.

After we reached the cloud and looked around a bit, this is the highest I've ever piloted, the instructor took the time to teach me some of the skills that we needed to be a bit higher to do safely, is really strange to get the plane to “Stall” and then have to recover. But with a good instructor in the back seat it turned out to be less difficult than I had imagined and it is key skill for safely flying, and in getting a license.

Of course during this time there was a lot of “hitting the books” to learn the rules of the road and the various skills needed. One of the things that I got to help out was a software program that had an identical aircraft as Freedoms wings and it can be easily set up to work with two joysticks like the hand controls in our glider (Silentwings.no) this software runs on windows, macs and linux computers and has Internet links where you can compete with other pilots. (another program is Condor.com, which only runs on Windows computers but is more popular in the US, both programs are similar and cost about the same)

The advantage of software training programs is one can practice things that would be expensive to do over and over or even dangerous to do in the real aircraft. Not to mention one can do it anytime/anyplace.

Well the aircraft are being prepped for winter and I will be working the books and flying the computer until next spring.

See you on the grid.