



Got your Wings yet?



AOPA's Wings Scheme aims to keep pilots active in general aviation by always giving them some new achievement to aim for. It was originally designed to address the fact that some 70 percent of new PPLs drop out of aviation within five years, but it is relevant to all GA pilots whatever their level of experience. A primary purpose is to improve flight safety – achievements are often safety-related, and a pilot who is current and proficient is a safer pilot.

The Wings Scheme provides bronze, silver, gold and platinum wings badges to pilots who have achieved tasks and qualifications set down by AOPA. The full list of qualification opportunities can be downloaded from the AOPA website www.aopa.co.uk – click on 'training and development' then choose 'AOPA Wings Awards'.

The Wings Scheme has been adopted by AOPA Members Working Group member Mark Stock, who is busy tweaking it to make it as user-friendly as possible. His first suggestion, proffered through the Members Working Group and taken up by the AOPA Board, was that Bronze Wings be given to everyone who qualifies as a PPL or NPPL, regardless of whether they are AOPA members. So if you know someone who has recently achieved their PPL but who doesn't wear Bronze Wings on their lapel, pass it on.

Check out the Wings data on the website to see which ones you qualify for. Perhaps you're just a couple of achievements away from getting the next one up? Here, two Wings holders at opposite ends of the experience curve offer their thoughts.



Bronze Wings: Chris Gunn

I'm a 33-year-old IT consultant who would like to fly anything and everything. I have flown the Cessna 152, 172, Piper Cadet, Cherokee and de Havilland Chipmunk DHC-1. I have amassed the sum total of 60 hours to date after passing my Skills Test at 45 hours (and 30 mins!) in May 2007 (following excellent instruction and guidance from Leicester Aero Club). I have been progressing my tailwheel conversion,

completed my complex training on VP props and flown lots of RHS hours in an attempt to build on my instrument appreciation and general piloting skills.

My main reason for applying to join the AOPA Wings Scheme was to provide some structure, focus and motivation to further develop my pilot skills, post PPL. One of the advantages of joining the scheme is the potential to gain more experience through the various certificates and syllabi of instruction on offer, delivered through either acquired knowledge, exposure, practical training or testing. The AOPA Radio Navigation Certificate, which provides members with ground and practical training, mainly around instrument appreciation, is a fine example of this. Apart from having attained a PPL, there are no further entry requirements. The course consists of formal training in radio navigation procedures for use under Visual Flight Rules in accordance with the privileges of respective licenses. Upon successful completion, the scheme member will be presented with a certificate which will provide credit towards the required hours for the IMCR (an exemption from up to five hours instrument training at the

Applied Stage of the IMC course (without time limit)).

Furthermore, for members to progress through the various awards, the scheme requires pilots to attend various forums and events, mostly safety-centric and including CAA Safety Evenings (which I can personally recommend as a newly qualified pilot, having recently attended one myself; it certainly focuses one's mind on things you may not necessarily consider in your flight planning, especially if you are recently qualified. Even for an aviation veteran, safety is still paramount after all!

I would encourage all new pilots, if not already a member of the scheme, to join and realise the benefits and structured progression on offer. Schools and training organisations could also play a part in motivating student pilots to join the scheme as it demonstrates to those perhaps not so convinced of the longevity of their aviation careers, post-PPL, that there is something more out there for them to aim at and therefore, further challenge themselves. Who knows, maybe we could even see a reduction in the pilot lapse rate! Here's hoping. ■

Platinum Wings: Steve Copeland

I learned to fly gliders as a teenager at RAF Syerston before gaining basic flight training with the RAF in the 80s. In 2000 I was bought a Microlight lesson by my wife and went on to complete the rating. I moved across to SEP aircraft in 2002, then went on to MEP. I have flown around 40 types – I regularly fly my own Cessna 172 Hawk XP and a Seneca, and often fly a variety of old tailwheel types including my favorite, the DHC Chipmunk. I have a JAA licence with IR and instructor ratings, night qualification, IMCR, MEP etc. I also have FAA and Canadian licenses and am qualified as a CAA Revalidation Examiner. I have just over 2,300 hrs of command time with around 800 hrs of instrument flight time. I fly around 300 – 400hrs a year for a mixture of business, pleasure and flight instruction and in a combination of VFR and IFR airways flying.

I am a great supporter of the AOPA Wings scheme as it gives pilots something to aim for beyond the £100 bacon sandwich after completing the PPL. Rather than sitting in the club house deciding what to do with their shiny new licence (once the rush of flying friends and family is over) the pilot can enroll



in the Wings Scheme and have targets to aim for. Each level becomes progressively harder to attain, and the requirement to do longer and more challenging cross-countries, attend safety seminars and skill development courses keeps the pilot focused on safety and self improvement. To gain my own Platinum Wings involved tours around Europe in the 172 to places like Prague, Minorca and Majorca and

Milan via Cannes and Nice as well as attending several CAA safety evenings, Military Civil Air Safety Days and instructor seminars. I also competed in various air rallies including the Jersey and Guernsey rallies.

As a scheme it is a great way to get others involved with your flying, and encouraging them to progress further by doing interesting trips and sharing the planning and flying. I think these constant challenges keep pilots interested in personal development and help us to retain enthusiastic aviators by giving them goals to focus on. I took a friend on several hundred hours of flying trips in pursuit of my Platinum Wings and he was so taken with the challenge that he learnt to fly himself and this year gained his Bronze Wings and has already completed complex differences and is planning the AOPA Radio Navigation Certificate, tailwheel training and entry into the Jersey air rally towards gaining his Silver Wings. I have introduced several other friends to the scheme at a time when they were starting to feel a bit jaded with flying, repeating the same flights over and over. They find themselves rejuvenated and enjoying their flying again with goals to achieve. Gaining my Platinum Wings has given me focus to continue developing as a pilot and I intend to encourage others to do the same. ■

