



The kids are all right

*A youthful face is a rarity in many flying clubs –
Pat Malone talks to aspiring young pilots to try
to understand why*

Jack Havery was just 13 when he got on his bike and cycled to Barton aerodrome in Manchester. Besotted with aircraft and determined to become a pilot, Jack plucked up the courage to walk into a flying school and ask if there was something, anything, he could do to help, because he just wanted to be around planes. The reception was cold and somewhat abrupt; Jack was sent away with the advice that he should 'try somewhere else'. Undeterred, he did indeed try somewhere else – everywhere else on the airfield, in fact – and with varying degrees of indifference or friendliness they shook their heads and passed him along the chain.

Finally, Jack found himself outside a hangar in which a man was working, and he went in and repeated his mantra – sweep the floor, make the tea, anything. The man looked him up and down, smiled and said yes, he might just have something for him if he came back tomorrow. Jack cycled an hour home again, feeling on top of the world. Next day he reported as requested to this chap, who turned out to be Philip Robinson of Flight Academy Ltd, and he was given the job of transferring flight authorisation logs onto an Excel spreadsheet.

Jack's meeting with Phil Robinson represented a fork in the road for a boy who might easily have left Barton disillusioned and been lost to aviation. Today, Jack still does jobs for Phil Robinson while working on his Level 3 BTEC in Aviation Operations at South Trafford College and saving every penny he

gets to pay for flying lessons. Some of us might say he's like we were when we were kids – hangar rats who'd do anything for a flight. But where have they all gone?

It's too simplistic to say that GA is unwelcoming of youngsters, but it is one aspect of a complex scenario involving perceptions, cost, alternative attractions and more. Jack Havery, articulate beyond his 16 years, has some thought-provoking insights. What can we do about the absence of role models and aviation heroes, the cost and the taxes, the mountain you have to climb? Jack urges that we liberate the airline pilot from his terrorist prison, where he remains invisible under lock and key. Remember the confident commander, egg on cap and stripes on sleeve, glad-handing his way down the aisle? Remember queueing up at the cockpit door for five minutes in that high-tech holy of holies? No kid today has ever done that, and much is lost... surely we're smart enough to contrive a way to make it possible again?

Jack has wanted to fly since he was three years old, when his father bought a PC-based simulator (Flight Sim 98). Little Jack had a go, and quickly crashed the plane. He kept trying, and soon he did not crash. His interest developed; his aunt Cathy was cabin crew on BA, BCal and MyTravel and brought home plastic models which Jack played with until they were broken. When he was eight, his father bought him a cheap airband radio and took him to Barton aerodrome. Jack walked into the tower and asked for the frequency, switched on the radio and

heard pilots talking...

"From that moment I knew what I wanted to do," he says.

It takes great courage for a 13-year-old to walk into an office and ask a group of grown-ups for help. "I operate on the principle that if you don't ask you don't get," Jack says. But how many youngsters would find the experience too daunting, especially when they were knocked back? Couldn't we make it easier for them?

Jack had joined the Air Cadets three months before his 13th birthday and is still with 318 Sale Squadron. "Some people love the combat clothing, the camps and the exercises for their own sake, and some join because it improves their CV," he says. "I joined for the flying. I've been to Shawbury, flown in the Tutor from Woodvale, in the E3 from Waddington, I've been to Linton on Ouse where the Tucanos are based. I flew the Tutor with an instructor who was a Captain with British Airways, flying long-haul 747s – he didn't tell me that, I had to ask him – and he was great, he let me taxi out and fly the plane."

Jack applied to join the RAF but was turned down because he wears glasses. "I asked about laser eye surgery but the medical officer said they wouldn't accept it. He didn't say why, but I've researched it and apparently at altitude it can rupture the blood vessels behind the eye, leading to loss of vision. It was a disappointment, but I half expected it because my eyesight deteriorated slightly when I was about 12 and I thought it might be an obstacle. But it just means I have to become a pilot another way." →

Left: Jack Havery at Barton, where he's been a fixture since he was 13 years old
Below: Jack with his mentor Philip Robinson and the Heli-Support crew truck



→ Today Jack is leaning towards rotary-wing flight because he enjoys the interaction with the customers – one of the jobs he has graduated to under Phil Robinson's guiding hand is giving safety briefings and loading pax on helicopter pleasure flights. Phil also runs a company

called Heli-Support which provides anything a helicopter operator might need out in the field, from passenger handling to refuelling, and Jack has become a useful member of that team. He's keen to ensure the helicopters are professionally turned out and spotlessly clean. No money

changes hands – Phil banks flying credits while Jack saves his own money in his flying fund, which has almost £1,000 in it. He's applied for about 50 part-time jobs to help support his habit, but work isn't that easy to come by in Manchester today and the money doesn't go far. "I'm not the

'Flying needs to become more fun'



Sixteen-year-old student Daniel Steele gives some insights into the thinking of his contemporaries

Interest in aviation from the younger generations has dramatically fallen in the last few years and I went on a mission to find out why. I, now 16 and doing my PPL, wanted to be a pilot for as long as I can remember, but other people my age too often struggle to see the point in it.

When I first started to take my licence I thought the reaction from other teenagers would be at least be a 'that's cool', but instead I was really surprised when some of the reactions I get are more along the lines of 'why are you doing that?' and 'isn't it boring?' Honestly, try explaining to someone why you love flying... you can't. The reason pilots pilot is because we love it, and for some obscure reason our love for flying is becoming less apparent in younger generations.

Definitely one of the bigger reasons why is because of the way we think of aircraft. Along with you 'old people' I think of planes, such as the Cessna 152 that I fly, as a stable and reliable bird, but if you look at it from another point of view I fly a 35 year-old, slow, scuffed washing machine... The appeal just isn't there any more, and more up-to-date aircraft are far too overpriced for most people to afford.

Which leads on to the infamous 'price' problem. I was talking to a friend at school who was thinking about becoming a pilot but then I had to drop the £140,000 bomb – the price of getting your ATPL, with type rating, and still no guarantee of a job. He instantly gave up on that thought.

I probably would have joined the ranks of the uninterested if I didn't live literally next door to Denham aerodrome and my first PC game wasn't Microsoft Flight Sim 2002. Even with this information I'm not sure what could be done to stir up more

interest from my friends, other than to do the things that we all want like

lowering training costs even at a PPL level, making exams more useful (i.e. not having to quote from an irrelevant paragraph of the Chicago Convention which would never apply to most pilots) and making flying more relaxing in the UK, where you are often concerned with how close you are to the edges of the narrow tunnel you have to fly through to avoid the TMAs and other airspace restrictions.

One thing I was sort of expecting, but not to this level, was how you need to know where you are at every moment. Not because you might just get lost, but you might stray into controlled airspace and 'bad things' will happen. And this concern about your location amongst other things, at least when you first begin, really sucks the fun out of flying. So, though I'm not sure how, flying needs to become more fun and less about how you might be infringing by 10ft into restricted airspace.

Another weird response that I got from people when I asked them why they weren't interested – they said it was 'too much effort'. Yes, flying does require you to pass a few exams, but laziness shouldn't really be a factor when considering GA.

Finally, airliner pilots aren't exalted like they were not too long ago. 'Back in the day', pilots were paid handsomely and were regarded as having one of the best jobs. Now it seems that only people who really, really love flying regard the commercial pilot as having a dream job because of the low pay, long hours and the way people think that it is just a computer that flies the aircraft.

Denham student Daniel Steele with a Cessna 172 – not flown by a computer

type to be daunted and I know I have a mountain to climb,” Jack says. “There are no sponsorships or scholarships out there, so I’m on my own. But I will get there in the end.”

Money is the biggest challenge – simply getting an Instrument Rating on a helicopter can cost more than £40,000, but Jack thinks that’s not why boys and girls of his generation are not drawn to aviation. “As far as I can see it’s always been expensive,” he says. “Maybe not as bad as it is now, but never cheap. For a lot of my friends, it’s just that it doesn’t seem possible. They simply can’t believe I come up to the airfield at weekends and fly in helicopters. The interest is there – we had a Sea King from RAF Shawbury land in the school grounds and the excitement was phenomenal, they talked about it for weeks. But they don’t seem to accept that they can do it themselves. Some think they’re too young, and by the time they consider themselves old enough they’ve taken another career path.”

Do we keep GA a secret? Jack says that South Trafford College’s Aviation Operations course is not heavily over-subscribed because people don’t know about it. He found it almost by accident while trawling the web, and the College



Above: Jack at the controls of an R44, with Phil Robinson in the instructor's seat

keeps two Ikarus C42 aircraft at Barton for practical demonstrations of how aircraft fly. How cool is that! The course covers all aspects of running an aviation-related business, and students get to experience

hands-on ramp operations at Manchester Airport. With an eye to his career choice Jack obtained good GCSEs, including maths and physics, and he has a qualification, a QAI, which allows him to teach his fellow air cadets about principles of flight and other aviation mysteries.

Above all, Jack says, pilots have to be more visible, in GA and in professional aviation. Ask a kid today to name a pilot, and what would he say? “The first thing to do is to let the pilot walk through the plane again, and open up the cockpit so young people can get in,” Jack says. “It’s become a cliché, but if you lock them in, the terrorists have won... they’ve succeeded in making us scared of what they’re capable of.”

And we can all be more welcoming. “Meeting Phil was the major milestone for me,” Jack adds.

“He’s like family – he’s put up with me, given me what he can, he’s encouraged me, been good to me... life might have been very different but for Phil. You can’t really turn somebody who’s not interested in aviation into a pilot, but you can easily discourage someone who is interested but needs motivation and help.” ■

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