

Air Time

Flying lessons give students the opportunity to reach new heights

By THOMAS PHILLIPS
THE BATTALION

For Justin Shemo, fear of heights is unknown territory. Shemo, a sophomore aerospace engineering major, said he plans to follow in the footsteps of his father, a former Air Force F-16 fighter pilot and a current pilot for Delta Airlines.

"I knew I wanted to be a pilot around age 10, but I didn't know that much about it," Shemo said.

Shemo became a private pilot when he was 18 years old. Now, his license has progressed to include an instrument rating, which allows him to fly in bad weather. With the knowledge he acquired to achieve this rating, Shemo can pilot an aircraft using only the instruments in front of him for navigation.

"It's cool, because you can take off and land the airplane without even looking outside the cockpit," Shemo said. "You just look straight at your instruments."

When he is flying, Shemo said he practices his maneuvers and perfects the skills he will need to get his commercial rating. Josh Bain and Christopher Keen, flight instructors at Easterwood Airport for Pries Aviation, said anyone can learn to pilot an airplane.

"We could make a pilot out of anybody. It doesn't matter if you're 10 years old; you could learn to fly," Bain said.

As flight instructors, their job consists of teaching people and molding them into aviators.

"It's nothing the average Joe Schmo off the street can't come in and do," Bain said. "We have people coming in with aviation backgrounds, but there's several also that are just coming from ground zero."

And getting off the ground might not be that tough. According to Bain and Keen, time, dedication and a little bit of money are the three key things to becoming a licensed private pilot.

After 40 hours of flight time and a certified instructor's signature, a former ground-bound individual can rightfully claim air time.

During one-on-one sessions, an instructor teaches trainees the basics of transport.

"Safety is the biggest thing," Bain said. "If [the instructor] feels you are safe and ready to go, they'll sign you off."

And despite any fears that might spring from taking to the skies and being in a small aircraft, the instructors said the dangers of piloting, when done properly, are few.

"The small amount of risk involved in flying an airplane is minuscule compared to everyday life," Keen said.

Along with the 40 hours of flight time, student flyers can expect about 10 hours of ground study. This involves studying charts, manuals and regulations set forth by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

"Not only is it just flying a plane," Keen

"Once you push the throttle up on the runway, you just kind of get this feeling. It's cool coming off the ground, just knowing the responsibility you have to land that plane."

— Justin Shemo
flight student

said. "You're also applying the knowledge and correlating between what you've learned on the ground and what you've learned in the air. You put them all together to get the total outcome."

Most of the people Bain and Keen instruct are working toward an airline pilot rating on their license. In exchange for future benefits and exceptional salaries, people commit themselves to reaching their goal of one day flying others around the globe.

This training does not come cheap, however.

An air transport pilot's certificate takes at least 1,200 hours of flight time, not to mention additional ground studies and fees.

"If they're not oriented to just doing it as an airline pilot, then some people want to get into the business deal of it — flying personal charters, smaller jets or government type stuff," Keen said.

To fly in services other than airlines, pilots need to have 250 hours of flight time and a commercial pilot's certification. This certification allows the pilot to be compensated for his or her efforts.

Yet monetary rewards are not the only type of compensation pilots incur.

Shemo, who practices those maneuvers and skills required to acquire his commercial rating, said he occasionally takes his friends up for a ride to see the sights or simply passes over campus.

"That's probably the best kind of flying, just having some fun, showing places to people," Shemo said. "It's extremely beautiful up there, all the time, even if it's bad weather. Once you push the throttle up on the runway, you just kind of get this feeling. It's cool coming off the ground, just knowing the responsibility you have to land that plane."



Above: Ryan Goodman, a junior animal science major, flies over the Brazos Valley.

Below: Goodman, who is in flight training with Pries Aviation, inspects his plane before a practice flight.



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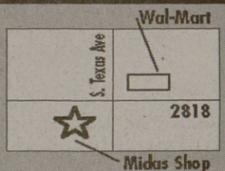
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