

A Special PPL

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April 16, 2009

1 How everything started

It is certainly not overstated to say that this article is about one of the more unusual ways of doing a JAR-PPL. When Richard Rogers suggested to me to do a JAR PPL in his Pitts Special S2C, I was hooked immediately. I had already had one flight in it before and was amazed by the degree of control and performance. It was the type of aeroplane I had dreamed of flying and here was the chance to jump in and go straight for a PPL. This was the best thing that could ever have happened. I had been flying gliders for 17 years with some basic aerobatics and had always wanted to extend my flying activities to powered airplanes, but not just to taxi a winged car around the sky, but rather to do aerobatics. What can be better than to do a PPL in an aerobatic aeroplane. In this article I will try to describe the advantages, challenges and exciting aspects that waited along the route.



The Pitts Special S2C in front of its home in Cranfield.

On my first trial lesson, I was still astonished by the rapid take off, which looked more like a winch launch, when Richard handed me the controls over. The degree of control the Pitts offers to the pilot is quite surprising and I was not really prepared for that, since I had not flown anything similar before. When I tried the first turn, I pushed the rudder to a deflection that would

be required in a normal glider ... just to feel myself being kicked into an enormous side slip ... whew! Apparently, the rudder seemed to prefer only to be thought of being pushed, rather than requiring any real deflection. A short while later I got used to it and was delighted how pleasant the plane handled in basic flight manoeuvres. Beforehand, I had not really known what to expect from an aerobatics aeroplane with 260hp, maybe something similar to a wild horse that tries to throw the inexperienced off. In fact, I found in the Pitts a rather tame aeroplane (as long as you do not use the full extent of control), which handles precisely and responds to control inputs with almost no delay. It is like dancing with a lady who follows promptly your lead. We went into some basic aerobatics, since I had some previous experience in that direction from gliding. Again, I was surprised about the easiness of flying simple figures, like rolls and loops. Ok, performing them in a manner that stands the eye of an aerobatics judge is a different story. What is assuring and provides security is the fact that the plane offers enough control, so that you can roll erect and recover from misshape quite easily. My stomach was quite happy with rolling through the sky. I guess gliding helps a lot in that respect as one tends to turn a lot if there are no nice cloud streets about. Thus, Richard could demonstrate all kind of spins, including fast rotating flat ones about which I previously had only heard rather horrific stories. After landing there was a smile on my face, which stayed for the next two days and this has been like it for almost all the flights.

In the next lesson it was my turn to be in the rear seat. After getting inside, I was simply amazed to sit there with the two wings in front looking along the fuselage which ends with a big engine and a serious propeller. Since things like mixture control and temperature gauges are not available in the front, the instructor needs to have some faith in the students abilities. He will frequently inquire engine parameters, such as temperatures, and ask to set cowl flaps, mixture, check the fuel status or change radio frequencies. This is in fact quite a good multi crew training exercise and after some time you develop the habit of regularly telling the instructor the parameters he has not available, but need to be checked regularly for staying out of trouble. The purpose of this flight was primarily to get used to the rear seat and was thus similar to the previous lesson. However, coming back to Cranfield it was time for my first landing attempt. Now, the Pitts is easy to fly in the sky, but landing it nicely is challenging and requires one hundred percent concentration. It falls under the category tail dragger and has therefore a tendency

to bounce back into the air when touching down on the main wheels only (except when doing a wheel landing). I assume that this is the fate of most people who try to land on the first time. Well, my first bounce was not that bad and the aeroplane had lost enough energy to stay on the ground after touching down for the second time. Nevertheless, getting it right seemed to require practice. By doing so, it is actually almost advisable to screw it up at least once beyond the point at which a bad landing can still be recovered and there is no other choice but to go around. In that respect, the powerful engine provides a real safety net. You only need to apply gently full throttle and the aircraft will go up immediately and pull you easily out of a messed up landing, so that you can have another try.



View from the rear cockpit.

The following lessons were mainly concerned with general handling, like climbing, descending, establishing cruise at different speeds, turns with different degrees of bank, stalling and spinning. You might not expect it, but the Pitts is actually very pleasant to spin. It has an easily recognisable buffet and enters the auto rotation quite unexcited and predictably. For a flying student that is probably much less shocking than some of the gliders I did spin, which initially seem to roll you almost upside down, resulting in a noticeable dose of adrenalin. Some people may disagree, but general handling

in an aerobatic trainer includes basic aerobatics. This level of training is not required by the current PPL syllabus, but there was actually a time when most people who learned flying were introduced to some basic aerobatics. It is not like this anymore, which I personally think is a bit of a shame. But then, the PPL syllabus defines the minimum requirements and no one stops you from learning more if you want. Obviously, you need a suitable aircraft and an experienced instructor. Luckily, both were there in my case and I did not have to fill the 45 hours that are required for PPL training by going straight and level most of the time. We included a few spins and basic aerobatic elements into each lesson to gradually extend my own flight envelope to get somewhere near that of the aeroplane. Admittedly, 50 hours later I am still far from matching its capabilities, which is however a very good thing as it still leaves enough room for further learning and improvement. We also practised regularly what is usually advertised as upset training. For that, Richard put the plane into some less ordinary attitudes, which require some action by the pilot, like inverted nose high attitudes, spins or tumbles. The aim is to learn to keep calm in these situations, to close the throttle (simplifies things), watch and analyse what the aeroplane does and then recover accordingly. Great fun ;-)

2 Navigation exercise to Germany

The PPL syllabus requires several hours of dual instruction navigation exercises. Due to my gliding background I already had a lot of training in visual navigation, although in a glider you will never try to fly a straight line and it takes some practice to get from this energetically optimised style of navigating to the type of navigation for powered aeroplanes, where you try to fly as close as you can according to a plan in terms of track and time. The first little navigation exercise from Cranfield to Peterborough-Connington was not especially difficult and we started to look for something more interesting. Eventually, we thought that I would probably learn a lot on a trip across the channel. I had only flown about 4 hours at this stage, but it would subject me to all that is needed to fly an aeroplane through Europe. My hometown Greiz is in the eastern part of Germany, about 600 nm from Cranfield. This can be reached comfortably in one day and it seemed a great idea to show Richard where I used to fly gliders. The trip would mean two solid days of

flying, enough to feel at home in the aeroplane, and beside navigation cover a whole range of exercises including cruising at desired altitudes and speeds, climbing, descending, a variety of approaches, a lot of radio communication and flight planning. So, our plan was to wait for good weather of at least two days to be able to fly to Greiz and back the following day.

One of the late September weekends promised to have a fair spell with a high pressure area stretching all across west and middle Europe. This was ideal for the trip and with Richard's help I prepared the route to Greiz and back during the week before the trip. The plan was to do three legs outbound via Belgium: Cranfield - Kortrijk (Belgium) - Koblenz (Germany) - Greiz and to come back through France. Because I had only a few landings until then, we had a circuit session to get me used to landing the Pitts. On Thursday evening we filled the aeroplane up with fuel, including the auxiliary tank, filed the flight plan and the customs declaration for the return. On Friday morning, we met at 7 a.m. on the airfield, loaded the Pitts and put the swimming vests on. Beside the fact that they are mandatory it seems a rather good idea to have one in case the engine decides to stop in the middle of the channel. Our departure was slightly delayed by a fouled spark plug, but after cleaning it we took off and headed south to contact Luton radar, who cleared us to cross over the eastern threshold behind a landing B737.



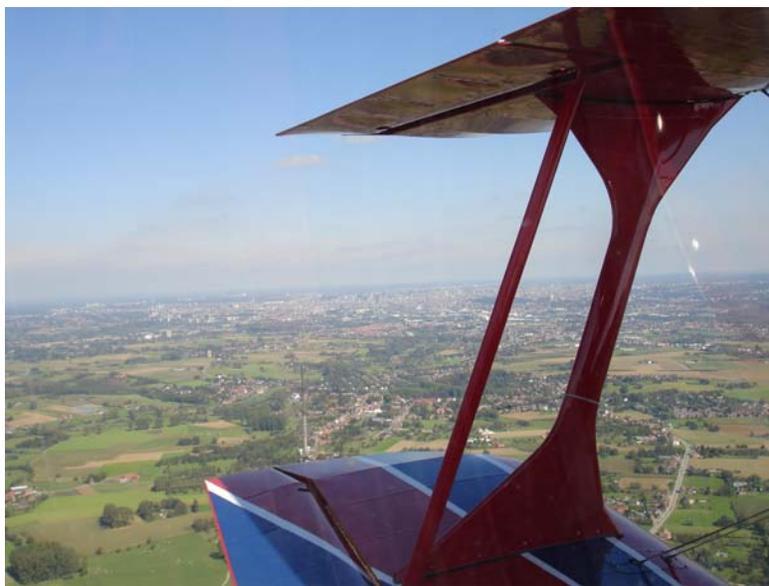
Over Canterbury.



Coasting out from Dover.

The route then led us between Stapleford and London city, over the isle of Sheppey, Canterbury and Dover. From Dover we headed towards the imaginary point Konan, half way between Dover and Koksijde. Flying with a small aircraft over the channel is a bit exciting and wonderful when you just run over tops of some nice cumulus clouds. Passing Konan, we changed from London to Ostende Approach, coasted in over the sand dunes of Flanders near Koksijde and continued straight to Kortrijk. The run-

way in Kortrijk is similar to Cranfield, so landing was not a problem. After refuelling, we had to walk over to the public side of the small terminal building. For this we had to present our passports before entering the Schengen region of Europe. In the tower, we filed the flight plan for the next leg to Germany and after enjoying the sun for a while we went back to the aircraft, where maps had to be changed. When you have not seen it before, then, the aeronautical chart of Belgium looks rather intimidating and you seriously wonder how to cross that country from west to east apart from flying at very low level. Now, this is where the friendly air traffic service comes in handy. Shortly after take off, we changed to Brussels Information and were subsequently handed over from station to station and routed past Brussels (just had to take care not to hit that very high antenna south of Brussels) and over Liege.



Routing around Brussels.

Since, I had not done many flights in a powered aeroplane before this journey, my radio communication skills were not quite adequate yet and many times I just did not understand the controller or my brain deadlocked and I did not know what to say. In those cases Richard took smoothly over and handled in fact most of the communication. As we progressed further east and had repeated the standard calls often enough, I started to get the hang of it and increasingly managed to decipher what the the guy on the

other end tried to tell us and even remembered what to say. From Liege our route led over the Ardennes into Germany and straight to Koblenz.



Stop in Koblenz.

Koblenz is located where the river Mosel joins the river Rhine. The airfield itself is placed inside a loop of the Mosel high above the river, which flows in a deeply cut beautiful valley with steep slopes. On the final approach, the airfield has the resemblance of an aircraft carrier. The runway is relatively narrow and landing the Pitts there felt very fast. When I had not managed to touch down with half of the runway behind us, Richard remarked that it would probably be a good idea to go around. I thought so too and had another go which was more successful. A short while later, we had refuelled the tanks of the aircraft with petrol and ourselves with some excellent Greek food from the airfield restaurant. Then it was time to get on with the last leg. The weaving way of taxiing was not known amongst all the local pilots and the guy taxiing behind us was slightly concerned that we were actually drunk until his colleague pointed out that one cannot see through the big lump of engine in front. After taking off, we let the local Buccaci trainer draw loops on the sky and headed further east. The airspace in Germany is much less crowded than in Belgium or around London. Thus, this leg was pretty relaxed and we just cruised along at FL55 making 150 kt ground speed. Late afternoon we arrived in Greiz, which is a small grass

airfield with a 580 m long runway. The initial plan was to make first a low pass to see whether I would get it down nicely, but the approach was good and instead of giving full power, I throttled fully back and down we were. We made some space in one of the small hangers (very handy if you have a small biplane) and had some German barbecue at my parents place with famous Thuringer Rostbratwurst (Thuringian grill sausage) and local beer.



Getting the aeroplane ready in Greiz for flying back to Britain.

Next morning, we woke up to beautiful sunshine again and finalised our route for the return to Britain. The plan was to route Greiz - Kulmbach - Saarlouis - Kotrijk - Cranfield, which would lead us through north eastern France. To get practice in different types of navigation, the idea was to use visual, radio and GPS based navigation or a mix of them for the individual legs. On the way to Germany, we had navigated visually with support of the GPS in particular in the vicinity of the dense controlled airspaces of London and Brussels. For the way back, we planned to use pure visual navigation on the first two legs until Saarlouis and radio navigation for the remainder part. After a filling breakfast, we checked that the high pressure area was still in place, drove to the airfield and got the Pitts out of the hanger. The local glider pilots were busy getting their soaring machines ready for one of the last days of the year with usable thermals. Still, a Pitts Special from

Britain attracted a lot of attention while we arranged our few things inside the cabin. Admittedly, this requires some more careful thoughts in this type of plane, due to the lack of room for folding charts. Then we got in and I started up the engine. A minute later or so I saw in the corner of my eye one of my former instructors waving his arms. Turning backwards to learn the reason for his excitement, I realised that we were perfectly placed for blowing lots of dirt with our big propeller straight into hanger ... Oops. I turned us around and made mental remark to extend the start up list. Take off was no problem. We went straight on heading and spotted the runway of Kulmbach 20 minutes later. Obviously, runways of small airfields like Kulmbach are relatively narrow and short, so the landing requires more precision than on a larger runway, like at Cranfield. In aeroplanes like the Pitts you also need to handle the problem of missing forward visibility when flying slow and, thus, with relatively nose high attitude. In order to keep the runway in sight on the final approach, this is done in a side slip. The slip is taken off during the flare and from this point the plane is kept straight by peripheral vision, as the only thing you see in front is engine. This makes it a very good idea to touch down shortly after passing the threshold. Otherwise, you may find yourself in the uncomfortable position to worry when the runway will finish during the roll out. Therefore, it is quite challenging to get the landing right, in particular at small runways, but it is fun to learn, a very good training for handling skills and enormously satisfying once you accomplish it. Now this time, I got it down nicely and after refuelling I planned the next leg to Saarlouis. Then we took off again to cross the remainder of Germany. I was quite happy that the calculated timings and headings worked out reasonably well. On the way we got a good look at the huge American military base near Ramstein, which is probably better known through the hard rock music of a band with the same name.

The stop in Saarlouis was similar to Kulmbach apart from the need to file a flight plan. After take off it was only 5 minutes to the French border, where we were greeted with a nice “Bonjou” from the lady at Paris Information. The French aeronautical chart is not as crowded as the Belgium one, but most of the airspace seems to be allocated to the military. The good thing is that the flight information service has radar available and informs one of active restricted areas on the planned flight route. So we cruised quite comfortable from VOR to VOR, crossed back into Belgium and landed once more at Kotrijk. There, we presented our passports again before leaving back for the British Island. The route back was basically the reverse of our



Awaiting refuelling in Kulmbach.

first leg. By then I had two days of radio communication behind me and I was nearly able to understand everything the controllers around London said, who seem to have a kind of competition in fast speaking. We got back to Cranfield comfortably before the airfield's closure time and put the Pitts back into the hanger. With the sun sinking below the horizon, I retraced two days of intensive experiences with the satisfied sensation that I had learned a lot during that trip.

3 Circuits

Cranfield's circuits are rather wide because of the high traffic load and the fact that most students are training for an ATPL. Being forced into a 4 miles long final with 70 kt and being number 3 or 4 is not really what you want in a Pitts and, thus, we went for circuit sessions preferably in typical British weather. With less than 2 other planes it is possible to fly what I would call a "Pitts circuit", which could be described like this: after taking off, you reach circuit height at the end of the runway (it is easy to climb past it by accident). You turn immediately crosswind and 5 seconds later downwind.



Approaching Britain.

By that time the engine should be throttled back and leaned off at 2300 RPM. Very soon you find yourself abeam the threshold and it is time to enter a final 180 degree descending turn, which brings you directly to the threshold. If you chose the turning radius too big or too small then you can still force the plane by side slipping and additional power exactly where you want it. Once you reach the threshold, you straighten up, close the throttle and feel it to the ground. This circuit would take under 3 minutes. Many times Cranfield's controllers were kind enough to let us "overtake" other circuit traffic inside when there was sufficient clearance and in average we made 2 circuits where the usual training aircraft did one.

Obviously, things happen fast in such a short circuit and initially it is quite a demanding task. During the first ones, I was a bit overwhelmed and only coped with the help of Richard, who talked me through and managed the radio. After a bit of practice I started to be mentally ahead of the aeroplane and it was a delight to go around again, practising for a perfect landing. Well, I guess they will never be really perfect, but I shall still strive to get it as close as I can.

We also had to do some fast approaches, where you come in with about 140 mph. The advantage is that the attitude is lower and you can look ahead over the nose, so no side slip is required. Shortly before reaching the

threshold you close the throttle and slowly bring the stick back while the aeroplane loses speed. At this point you can either go for a normal three point landing or do a wheel landing, where you fly the aeroplane onto the ground and keep it there while the speed drops. The fast approach combined with a wheel landing seems more suitable for stronger winds.

When I write normal three point landing, then I should probably mention that we use a modification to the method which is to my knowledge taught normally. In most tail draggers, like a Tiger Moth or Piper Cub, you would bring the stick fully back once you touched down on three wheels. In fact, the stick may already be almost fully back as these aeroplanes land at 1G stalling speed. The Pitts, like other aerobatic aeroplanes, does not. At 1G stalling speed, the main wheels would be some distance above the ground while the tail wheel touched already. Therefore, the Pitts touches down in a three point landing at a higher than stalling speed and an uneven surface could cause it to leave the ground again. To counter this we use a technique where you bring the tail up immediately after touching down. This spoils any possible lift, protects the tail wheel and makes it easier to steer while slowing down.

4 Practised forced landings

Just like the circuits, practised forced landings (PFL) can be performed much faster than in conventional training aircraft. This applies for the descending part as well as for the successive climb. When you are cruising nicely along and the instructor throttles back to imitate an engine fault it decelerates rather dramatically, which feels like if someone slammed on the brakes. My first thought was, wow, the engine is pulling quite a lot, even in cruise mode. But actually you have not much time to philosophise, because when starting in 3000 ft you are only a good 90 seconds away from the ground. You will be busy sticking the nose down to keep at least 95 mph on the air speed indicator and to pick a suitable field. With a glide ratio of around 4 or 5 to 1, the Pitts is somewhat of the opposite to a high performance glider and it is better to find a field just straight below. With a lot of field landing experience in gliders, I did not expect to many problems to get a powered plane on a field. Well, the first time I tried the field that I picked proved to be unreachable. No problem, with a climb rate of about 2500 ft/min it does not take long to get back to 3000 ft and to try again. This time, I selected a

field just below and arrived in the final approach a bit high, but this could be corrected. With a proper slip, one can destroy nearly any unwanted height. From outside, such a slipped glide approach looks very steep and the aircraft seems to be falling literally out of the sky. From inside everything is under control as long as you have got enough speed to slow down the fast sink rate into a soft flare before hitting the hard deck. Obviously, if it only takes one and a half minutes to get down and another two minutes to get back into the starting position, you can do quite a lot of PFLs in relatively short time. This provided the opportunity of plenty of training to become comfortable in getting a powerless Pitts down in one piece.

5 Solo!

At some point I had trained enough to be ready to see how I would get on without an instructor. The only thing left to do was to pass the air law exam, which is a local rule for going solo. Once this was done we had a circuit session on a nice Saturday afternoon to make sure my landings were consistent and Richard had reason to believe that his aeroplane would still be in one piece afterwards. On the following Sunday morning two more circuits together and then it was time to get solo. Strictly speaking this was not going to be my first solo, because I had already had one in a glider, but it was going to be at least as exciting. Usually, during the first solo the student flies a circuit, but since the Pitts is a bit different, my first solo was going to be a bit different too. Our plan was that I would climb out some distance away from the airfield and play a bit around to get comfortable with flying the Pitts solo before coming back to land. The reason for this is that the aeroplane behaves slightly differently when you remove the man in front. The centre of gravity is further forward and the power to weight ratio is noticeable better. We secured the front seat harness, filled the tank to the top and then I got back in. A last question from Richard if I was comfortable, which I answered with a smile, and then I closed the canopy and went through the start up checks. The first thing I realised was that taxiing solo required much less pressure on the rudder pedals and the aeroplane felt lighter. After the engine and pre-takeoff checks I was ready, so "aeronaut 041, A1 ready for departure". Cranfield tower was happy with that, so "aeronaut 041, wind ..., runway 21, cleared for take off". Now it was entirely up to me to get it

up and down. Taxiing onto the runway I checked a last time trim, mixture, propeller pitch, canopy, the plan for an engine failure and that there was really nobody in the front seat. I then stood on the runway ready to go and thought: “how cool is that, I’d never thought that I would go solo in such an aeroplane like that!”



Once, I moved the throttle forward and the propeller pulled the machine along the runway, all thoughts were virtually blown away and I just got on with what I had trained many times before. Pushing the stick smoothly forward brought the tail slightly up to see in front and few seconds later the Pitts accelerated through 80 mph, enough for a little pull to lift it into the sky. Just like in taxiing, the missing weight of the instructor made itself known through an even greater responsiveness. I climbed out to the north, checked the inverted oil system and tried some spins, loops and rolls. Because of the more forward centre of gravity, I had to pull much more than I was used to and at some point my arm told me that it had worked out enough and required some rest. So, I made my way back to join the circuit. Like on most nice sunny weekends, the airfield was busy and I was advised to join downwind as number five. Nothing I could do about that, I just had to follow the B737 circuit. Obviously, landing was the most difficult part of the flight and I concentrated to get it right. Approach was like always between 90 to 100mph. To my surprise, the lesser weight made the flare much easier.

Then touch down on three wheels and stick forward to spill the lift and keep the tail off the ground. Using the toe brakes gave another little surprise as the tail started suddenly to move up even higher quite rapidly. Reducing the pressure on the brakes put it back to where it was supposed to be, until it sank eventually to ground when the speed had decreased so far that even and even full down elevator could not keep it up. I vacated the runway, taxied back and was greeted by Richard who was happy to see both, me (very excited) and the Pitts back in one piece. I will surely never forget this flight and remember the day as one of the happiest in my life.

At some point I also had to pass the remaining theoretical exams and we had a break in flying while I was busy learning. I assume that one can do them quite fast, but learning takes a considerable time if you insist on passing with something I consider a decent mark. Well, half a year later I am not sure how much of the exam knowledge is still left inside the brain. Anyway, the exams were finished and we got on with the flight training and concentrated to finish the necessary solo navigation exercises. A first short one was to Cambridge and back with some aerobatics over Grafham water. The most tricky part of that flight was probably taxiing at Cambridge and I needed some advice per radio from the controller to find my way through the “maze” without knocking any signs over with the propeller. For the way back, I had placed an additional way point at Grafham Water to train the BAeA standard sequence over the dam. After finishing off this exercise it was time to do something to get the cross country qualifier form signed.

6 The cross country qualifier

While we were about to try doing a proper PPL, we thought that a real cross country qualifier should test the skills that a pilot in Britain needs if he wants to make use of the privileges that the JAR-PPL grants him. So the choice fell on the route Cranfield - Kortrijk - Biggin Hill - Cranfield. Since Kortrijk is a small Belgian airport this route requires to file a flight plan, fill customs form, cross the channel two times and navigate through the dense airspace around London, including communicating with a variety of air traffic control services. Since we had already crossed the channel during the navigation exercise in the previous year, I knew that the route was not a problem as

long as you know what to do. So I got on with preparing the flight and after this was done the only thing left to do was waiting for suitable weather. Eventually, the 21st of July promised to open a nice weather window for the South East of England and we met early morning in bright sunshine and blue sky at the IAE hangar, where the Pitts lives. The weather check revealed a possible obstacle in form of a trough over the north sea, which moved slowly southward. However, a short telephone call to Kortrijk confirmed that their local weather would be suitable until late afternoon. We had refuelled the Pitts already the day before, including the top tank which holds a reserve of at least 25 minutes.



Coasting into Belgium near Koksijde.

I took off from Cranfield at 0800 UTC, changed to Luton radar and asked for permission to cross their control zone. The controller had some room for a Pitts and I could cross over the easterly threshold after a landing B737, straight towards Hatfield. From there the course was across the Lea valley, past Stapleford, St. Marys Marsh, Canterbury to Dover. Coasting out from Dover I continued eastward and passed Konan, the virtual reference point where the British, French and Belgian airspace meet. I got back over land near Koksijde, a Belgian military airfield, and continued to Kortrijk. Kortrijk itself is a bit difficult to spot in between this mingled urban area and confusing net of motor ways and a GPS is very useful in such circumstances.

I joined left downwind and landed very comfortably on the nice long runway 24. After refuelling, you need to go through the passport and customs check in order to get to the tower. The staff at the airport are very friendly and trustworthy. You only leave your address and registration in a log book and receive an invoice two months later. The commander signed my cross country qualifier form and after filing another flight plan I went back through the border check and departed at 1030 UTC back to England. 45 minutes later I touched down in Biggin Hill to get another signature. The last leg was back to Cranfield via Dartford motor way bridge through Luton's control zone. Before landing in Cranfield, I set squawk 7004 and trained some aerobatics.



The author over the channel.

7 Examination

There were a few hours left to fly until the required 45 and we filled them with a couple of solo flights. For each flight I would start off with a local navigation exercise, flew a standard aerobatics sequence near the first turning point and picked then randomly one of the diversions, that Richard had prepared. In most cases that was one of the many disused airfields in the

South East of England which slowly transform into fields or are dedicated to some other usage. After estimating the magnetic heading, arrival time and fuel requirement, I then tried to find the diversion destiny which worked out quite well most of the time. On the way back to Cranfield, I would perform two or three practised force landings. We also had a flight in Cranfield University's Bulldog to practise the instrument part. Eventually, I had accumulated 44 hours and it was time for the examination flight. As you can probably imagine, you will not find an examiner who can test you in Pitts special just around the corner, because the examiner must obviously be able to fly it himself. Now, we literally found him around the corner. Roger Bailey, the head of the National Flight Laboratory at Cranfield, is an examiner and he can, amongst many special aeroplanes, fly a Pitts Special. For my examination flight, he gave me the route Cranfield - Melton Mowbray - Graveley - Cranfield. Once I had flown us to Graveley, he asked me to divert to Sywell. On the way back to Cranfield, he checked that I was able to recover stalls, to perform practised forced landings and, finally, I had to do a high glide from Cranfield's overhead. Afterwards, we had a short flight in the Bulldog to cover the instrument part of the test. Roger was happy with the flight and thinks it safe to let me roam the skies of Britain. So he got on with filling lots of forms, which I then sent to the CAA. Only five weeks, two telephone calls and emails later, I actually received my licence hooray.

8 Summary

I have not heard of anyone else who has done a PPL in a Pitts Special before. This was most likely the first time and I am sure many of you who are reading this were not aware that one could do it or even thought it impossible due to the reputation of the Pitts being difficult to fly. Now, we have shown that it can be done and this will hopefully inspire others to go along the same route and choose this way as an alternative to today's standard PPL training. Certainly, it all depends on what you are planning to do with your flying licence. You may want to learn flying just to visit your relatives or your friends on a fair Sunday afternoon for coffee or 5 o'clock tea, and, therefore, consider an aeroplane as a car of the sky. If that is the case, you will most likely find a PPL in a Pitts a bit too demanding in terms of time and effort that such type of training requires. However, if you are striving to learn to be able to control an aeroplane at more than 30 degrees bank angle, if

you play with the thought of trying aerobatics, then this may be something for you. Bud Davisson, a well known American aerobatics flight instructor, writes: “Go and get a pilots license and then come to me when you want to learn to fly.” Well, you can form your own opinion, but I hope that this article convinced some of you that it is possible to learn it right from the start.



Finally, I would like to thank Richard Rogers for making this happen. It was the most amazing thing I have done in my life and it was unbelievable fun to learn powered flight in this aerobatic training aircraft. Each flight kept me smiling for a long while and just made me yearning for the next one. Along with Richard’s patient and competent instruction we have extended the JAR PPL syllabus quite a bit. I do not like to pat myself on the back, but I am confident to have obtained a much wider personal flying envelope than anyone could possibly acquire in a current ordinary flight training, such as a C150 or Piper Arrow. Now, as I actually have received my licence the learning is far from over, and this is fantastic, because it is one of the greatest fun in life try to master new challenges. I am sure that it will be many years until I will run out of new things in the true three dimensional world of flying. If all goes as planned I will fly my first aerobatics competition this year. Let’s see how I will get on.