



SOLOMON PROVES HE'S KING OF THE SKIES

Take a 15-year-old, add an addiction to aviation and watch what can be achieved. Mark Smith reports.

We all know Australia is a big country, though there aren't too many 15-year-olds who have experienced exactly how big it really is, especially solo from the air.

Solomon Cameron from Bendigo is one of the plucky few who gained his RAAus pilot certificate six days after achieving his first solo flight and then set his sights on a bigger goal – circumnavigating Australia following the coast to raise much needed funds for Angel Flight. Oh, and to cap it all off he's the youngest pilot to ever achieve it.

While he was able to take to the skies at 15, his mode of transport to the airfield was much less modern, with pedal power being his main way of getting to his lessons when his mother was unavailable to drive him.

His dream of flight started at an early age. "I have always had a passion for aviation. Growing up I spent hours playing on a flight simulator, dreaming of the day I could take to the skies for real. Every time a plane flew over, I would rush outside and frantically look for the source of the sound.

"Then when I was 11, I started riding my bike to Bendigo airport where I would sit on a bench and watch, as the planes took off and landed. Every time I saw someone walk past, I wished they would notice me, sitting on that bench, desperate to go flying. After sitting on the bench every weekend for a year, I swore to myself that if I ever saw someone like me when I was a pilot, I would take them flying and share the gift of aviation."

Over time his trips to Bendigo airfield began to pay off as members of the aero club took him under their wing. When he was 12 he had his first flying lesson. Any chance of leaving flying behind was lost.

His dedication led to club members taking him flying, as well as giving him work cleaning their aircraft, as well as other part time jobs cutting lawns paid, washing aeroplanes and cleaning offices. This work ethic helped build the money required to begin learning to fly in earnest.

"I am very proud to be able to say I funded my pilot certificate myself and a part of my goal with this trip was to show that with hard work anybody can achieve the dream of flight."

Solomon left on his expedition in early May, after spending the better part of a year planning the trip. His aircraft was a Jabiru 230, owned by his father. The help and encouragement of flying clubs across Australia proved vital to the trip, with families offering him accommodation and experienced pilots offering advice in some of the more remote areas.

"There was a lot of safety planning involved – risk assessments, mapping out fuel stops and where I would be staying. My biggest challenge was minimising the risk of fatigue. Flying over the ocean and some parts of Australia where landing options are less adequate also carried risk, so I tried to avoid the more dangerous places to fly over."

The trip took seven weeks and covered



15,000km. He says the trip has changed his perspective of Australia.

"Just seeing some of the places I'd never seen before and finding out how different they are to what I expected was a highlight. Especially up north in Queensland," Solomon said. "I learnt quite a bit about being independent and overcoming challenges. Being by myself and having to problem solve when there were a few issues. For example, in Forest It was a bit cold I was having trouble starting. I found another battery and was able to get it warmed up."

One of the other important aspects of the trip was to spend time with people of his age was to encourage them that flying is accessible to anyone with the will to get airborne.

"I like promoting aviation to 15-year-olds, and even younger that it's not impossible to achieve great things at a young age.

Now the trip is over the year ten student has set his sights on another challenge.

"I want to get my commercial licence and maybe go into flight training before trying to get into Qantas." ✈️