



# ‘I’ve got this’

BY RIC ATTARD

**I**T was in 2015, that my instructor, John Cresswell, asked me the question we all fear and, at the same time, yearn for.

Up to this point, I felt I’d managed to fly a trike with enough skill to keep my instructor from suffering a cardiac arrest whenever I had control of his aircraft. However, John was always in the back seat and I knew he wanted to live, so if I ever froze, panicked, or lost control, I knew he’d get us home safely despite the scalding I might receive later.

Weather conditions were good at Caboolture Aerodrome that morning, the skies were clear and I’d already completed a few smooth circuits with little, if any, input from John. After a well-executed landing, John instructed me to steer off to the right of the runway – then came the question - “Right, do you want to fly solo then?” Without hesitation I boldly responded, “Yes!”

Now at this point, you might think I had already carefully planned for this day, that I had often thought this moment through, role played it in my mind, perhaps even meditated over it – like I’m sure most of you did before you responded to that question. But no, not me. Without pause I just said ‘Yes,’ didn’t I? John got out of his awesome Airborne XT-912, gave me a few instructions, and began walking towards the hangar as I restarted the engine. That’s when ‘it’ happened, and the best way for me to describe what I’m talking about is this:

It was as though an emergency board meeting had been called. The old, sole founder and chairman of the board had made the decision without consulting the other board members. It was havoc! Here I was slowly and steadily taxiing along, and my mind was filled with shouts from the other board members in the room (my head as it were).

The Vice Chairman opened with - “He said WHAT!? He didn’t really say yes, he wouldn’t, not without checking with us, would he?”

Mr Safety followed - “Did he complete all the checks again...please tell me he did! I can’t find any paperwork...there’s nothing here!”

Mr Weather jumped up - “Hang on, hang on – what about wind shear, turbulence, sudden gusts, hail and tsunamis. What about all that! He has to check for weather warnings...someone stop him!”

Mr Health arced up - “Hey, Hey! Have any of you seen what’s happening in the chest cavity right now? How am I supposed to slow that heart down! Someone shut off the adrenalin valve – Hurry!”

Mr Worry (with an unblemished record of attendance) spoke up, “Um Mr Chairman... are you aware of how many light aircraft crashes occur each year, sir? Perhaps we should have a look at the statistics and ponder them together for a while.”

Mr Conservative mumbled “We really should be looking into taking up a less extreme activity like say, gardening, playing cards or lawn bowls, What do you say, Big Fella?”

Oh, they were all there demanding to be heard. Meanwhile there was the Chairman, leaning back, the top button of the shirt undone, his loosened, crooked tie draped over his belly and a cocky smirk on his face. The petty ramblings behind him began to fade. The Chairman knew he was prepared. He had been well trained, he’d listened, he’d practiced, and yes although he was a novice, he drew confidence from recalling moments of success from the past. Of course, the rest of the board was still bickering and carrying on, but as he looked ahead, the anxious cries of those members of the board who often caused him to fail (or worst of all, quit), reduced to a dull murmur.

So here I was. My heart was pumping and my hands were sweaty. The question, “What am I doing?” surfaced a few times, but I kept going. As I approached the threshold, I gave my first ever solo radio call and, though it might sound a little corny, just before I applied full throttle a grin emerged on my face as I recalled the words Ridley said to Chuck Yeager just before



“Why was it all going so well?”

The Chairman of the board

he rocketed away in the X-1 - “Put the spurs to her, Chuck!” KAPOW! Far out! I was pushed back in my seat, the air whooshed past me as the 85 horses galloped for the sky. Without the weight of my instructor in the back seat, the climb angle of this baby felt almost vertical. What a rush! I was away and almost instantly at 1,000ft. Ok, time to rein the horses in a little – pull back to cruise speed. It was beautiful – the wing taut and trimmed, the engine purring silently, and here I was suspended alone in the miracle of flight. Was it worth it? I don’t have the words to articulate the gratitude I felt (and still feel) when flying. We don’t do ‘this’ ...we humans ... we don’t fly. We walk, we swim, but we don’t fly – and yet here I was! ‘Magnificent men in their flying machines.’

“Look at me”, I thought, “I’m flying this thing on my own!” Then almost immediately “concentrate, Ric! Look right, centre, left. Now a medium-bank, cross-wind turn - good. Maintain 1,000ft, medium

left turn onto downwind - good. Primary reference, the horizon, not the instruments – yep. Straight & level flight. Get your runway reference, parallel - good. Ok, I’m set up - now landing checks. F.A.W.N.T.S. Fuel –sufficient. Area clear – nothing seen, nothing heard. Wind direction & strength – I can see the windsock, five knot south-easterly. Nose wheel straight – Grrr still using my feet to steer in the air. Ok, straight now. Hand throttle off, trim set for landing. Security – Helmet & Harness secured.

For some reason this wasn’t at all difficult, everything seemed to be going too well. I transmitted a radio call, completed my base, then final turn, pulled on some speed, approached then flared for a beautiful landing before taking off again. But I was puzzled. Why did this seem relatively easy? Why was it all going so well? Why was I having so much fun? The answer is, of course, hours and hours of submission to excellent instruction. I was having fun because I was doing what I had been taught to do

and it was all working!

The Chairman, for those of you who have their solo ahead of them, wasn’t smiling because he could fly the plane alone. He couldn’t – well not safely at any rate. He smiled because he knew his board members had been trained so well that when they were presented with challenges, they’d remember their purpose and they’d sort things out. The most exciting part of the flight was, (well actually the take-off was the most exciting part - far out that was awesome) but the second most exciting part was how everything just seemed to be smooth and automatic. Everything John had taught me had arranged itself into a rhythm. All the words, phrases and instructions I would normally recall in his voice, were now beginning to be in my own voice. Although there’s still much to learn, it’s very nice to be taxiing now and replacing the thought of, “What am I doing?” with that all-encouraging thought, “I’ve got this”. ☺