

What am I getting myself into?

So, you think you want to be a birdman (girl)? Here are some things to consider, and a *brief* outline of what it will take.

In the US, operating any kind of “aircraft” is regulated by the FAA. There are several different classes of license which correspond with the type of aircraft you want to pilot and the type of flying you want to do. The LFC is set up to provide instruction for two of the most common: Private Pilot (airplane single engine land, “ASEL”) and Instrument Pilot (ASEL). If you want to get into ultralights, seaplanes, light sport, or whatever, contact one of our instructors for advice, but our equipment really isn’t appropriate for the others.

The *minimum* requirements for PP-ASEL are spelled out in the Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs), 14 CFR part 61. These include:

“Ground School” – you have to complete an approved course of study that covers the theoretical basis of aviation, or study on your own (“home study”) and convince a certificated flight instructor (CFI) that you’ve mastered the *minimum* knowledge base to pass the “written” (it’s all computer based now-a-days, but most of us still call it the “written”) test. The basics are spelled out in FAR pt 61. Most people opt for buying a pre-packaged “kit” from Jeppesen, King or other school that ensures that you’ve covered the bases, but I’ve had several students do it the hard way, from texts, and they probably learned more in the process.

Passing the “written” (now called the knowledge test) with a score of 70% or better. At the moment, the nearest testing center is in Boulder. That may change, but I doubt that it will get much closer.

Obtaining a medical certificate from an aviation medical examiner (AME), this doubles as your student pilot certificate. An AME is specially licensed by the FAA to do flight physicals and is *not* your family doctor. There are currently none in Laramie. See the FAA website (<http://www.faa.gov/pilots/amelocator/>) for the nearest. It’s a good idea to get this out of the way early, because there are a number of fairly common conditions (e.g. color blindness) that are disqualifying, or take some extra time and effort to get past, and you don’t want the lack of a medical to hold up your training.

Flight training – this is what most people think of as “lessons” and consists of flying with and without a CFI. According to the FARs, it totals at least 40 hours and must include, at a *minimum*:

Solo - In order to fly a plane solo, you must first satisfy a list of things (FAR 61.93) that usually take about 10 hours with an instructor. Then:

10 hours of solo, including 5 hours of solo cross country (landing at an airport more than 50 nautical miles from home base).

3 hours of night (usually dual) flight Although it isn't explicitly spelled out as such, I'm not aware of any instructor who will allow a student to fly solo at night, at least not until they've got at least this much experience.

3 hours of "hood" (flight solely by reference to the instruments) Obviously, this requires an instructor.

3 hours "in preparation for the checkride". This can be combined with some of the other experience requirements, but must be complete within 60 days prior to the checkride.

There is also a list of maneuvers, etc. that have to be accomplished, which are accomplished in the dual segment of instruction.

Note: the *minimum* legal requirement is 40 hours, but the national average is closer to 60-70, and I've had some students pass their check ride in 40, some students have taken as much as hundred. It all depends upon the student.

Other considerations:

If you're not a US citizen, there are a bunch of post-911 requirements that, while not particularly difficult, *do* take some time and persistence to get thru.

Time and money – conservatively, it will require at least \$4000 and 5-6 months of evenings/weekends that you can devote to studying, and flying, and studying some more. If you can't honestly say that you have both, it's usually better to wait until you do. It is *very* frustrating to start, stop, and start again. (Ask me sometime about why it took me seven years to get my original license)

You have to be a member of the Laramie Flying Club to receive instruction in our airplane. (see <http://lfcinc.org/5.html> for details) This is an insurance requirement, not a FAA requirement. Instructors are allowed to do an "introductory" flight or two to see if this is something you really want to get into, but to go any further you have to pony up the money to join, *and* do your share of the club chores.

The LFC is a club, i.e. a cooperative effort, devoted to providing the lowest cost flying, practical. I can honestly say that there isn't a better deal, financially, in the area, but we accomplish this by volunteers (club members) doing as much as is legally possible to keep the club operating and our plane in the air.

That said, and being a club, there's always some clown that figures "this doesn't apply to me. Among the instructors' pet peeves are trash in the cockpit, squawks that don't get squawked, and puke in the back seat. *Please*, treat it like it is *yours*. *It is!*

There are a number of operations near some of the bigger cities in the country that offer “one month” or similar courses. These obviously cost more than LFC, but, in addition, they don’t give you the breadth of experience that flying in many different seasons does, nor do they allow for the personal attention that working with an instructor who has only one or two student, does.

Although our insurance precludes receiving instruction in the club plane from a non-member instructor, instructors are self-employed free agents. What each charges is up to the instructor and is not part of the cost of airplane.

If you’re interested, contact the LFC, or one of the instructors, about getting signed up.

Merl Raisbeck

ASEL, AMEL, ASES, COMM, Glider, CFII