



Can You Remember Your First Time?

By Dinah Wilkinson



There are many "firsts" in one's life. But flying in a gyro was not on my list or had even crossed my mind. I wasn't even aware of their existence until Tony "mentioned" them to me and would I mind if he went off to The USA for a conference at Hofstra University. That was in 2003.

Tony asked me casually one day if I would like to be a passenger in one. Hmm I thought, this is me who prefers to sit on an aisle seat in a commercial aeroplane. I don't like looking out of the window and seeing the ground level with the window. The ground should be underneath at all times!! I have also always detested theme parks and fun-fair rides. Plus all the other adverse reasons I could find: windy, cold, wet, impractical, where do you put luggage etc. Maybe I could postpone the answer for a while I thought. So I did. Really the odds for me not liking flying in one were high, and liking it very low. Unfortunately, I could only bring to mind many disadvantages and not many advantages.

So to be fair I was prepared to give it a go... someday in the future.

Time moved on a bit. He organised himself flying lessons etc. Bought a plane with 2 seats. That was a small hint that I might have to have a flight... sometime.

Over time I gained courage and mentally prepared myself for "the day". "Grit your teeth and get on with it." I told myself.

That day finally arrived. June 14th 2006. Even the British weather gave me no excuse. Maybe I was still in the holiday mood and relaxed after spending a few days in France, which included 2 days (should have been one), at the gyro event in Bois De La Pierre (that's another story).

Off we went to the airfield. Tony for his lesson with David, and I (as long as the weather stayed perfect) would have a flight. So filled with trepidation and very apprehensively I took a deep breath, gritted my teeth, and got on with it:

I borrowed a flying suit and helmet and climbed aboard in the back and got tightly strapped in. David went through what to do in an emergency and gave me a flight briefing. Safety checks and whatever were done etc. and David told me what he was doing to get the plane going. I waved to Tony and Mac (my border collie who was to witness the event as well) as we taxied to runway.



Fixed very securely in my seat, hands on thighs. My eyes staring firmly forward, slightly to the side of David's head. Off we went. I was reassured by David explaining what was happening, and what would happen and what to expect. We were moving. Then the nose lifted, we were off the ground. So far so good.

Whilst ascending, (albeit very gently I was later told) I felt the need to "hold on". Where does one put one's hands? The only safe place I could find was on the back of David's seat. My eyes were fixed ahead on the horizon, (don't forget I don't like seats with a view!). My head was somewhat immovable anyway. We got up to 500feet-ish I think and could have gone higher but that was high enough for me. So we stayed at that height.

Whole new sets of experiences were taking place: I was (literally) speechless at finding myself in this new predicament, slightly unsure, very apprehensive, wrestling with my feelings, absorbing the ambience. Feeling vulnerable, helpless, dependant and out of my depth within the vast open space, whilst at the same time being privileged to be in the air getting a birds eye view. Totally extraordinary and really indescribable. All in all not quite as spine chilling as I had pre-judged it to be.

The scenery was picture postcard lovely. Lots of green fields and trees in the distance at (sort of) horizon level. (I couldn't look *down* for all the tea in China) Ferrybridge Power Station in the distance being seen by me for the first time from a completely new dimension.

Trouble is I was still unable to move my head. My gaze was fixed forward only. I was glued, only my eyes were able to move. Don't know if this was terror, insecurity or just plain scared. Or not wanting to "tip" the gyro, (which I was told does not happen — but I did not want to risk it!)

I was surprised how quiet it was and was neither cold nor windy. I had expected it to be very noisy, very cold, and very breezy. (Of course the higher you are the colder and breezier it will be). But for a first time gyro passenger expecting it to be really unpleasant, it wasn't. The fields on the edge of my view moved slowly by. (Yes fields, not clouds!) Though at one point it felt like we were stationary in the sky. We were, I think... it was just before the landing procedure.

Eventually it was time to land. It was a very smooth and quick landing. My head unfroze I was able to glance down at the speed and height controls as we were coming in to land. Don't know if I was relieved, sad, or glad, probably all three when we were back on the runway.

During the flight, David explained what was happening which I found most reassuring and interesting, as I'm keen to increase my vocabulary and knowledge of this gyro world. If you can't beat them at least you can understand some of the chitchat later on.

Now I know what to expect I'll aim to go higher (more than 500 feet) next time. But for the foreseeable strictly as a passenger.

Thanks to David Beevers and his smooth manoeuvres for ensuring a pleasant flight for me. I'll be back!!

Dinah Wilkinson

Dinah in the VPM - looking a teeny bit apprehensive !