

JS pilot makes solo flight

June 12, 2012

The Express

LOCK HAVEN -No matter how persistently one works toward a goal, life sometimes has a habit of getting in the way.

That was the case for John Knepp, 30, of Jersey Shore. The goal in Knepp's case was learning to fly. Eleven years ago, while a student, he started flight training at University Park airport in State College, and made excellent progress.

Within his first month of flight training, he had logged 16 hours of instructional time, and completed his first solo flight.

Then, life got in the way. Over the next year, Knepp continued to take flying lessons as his time and budget would allow, while juggling school and other responsibilities. Ultimately he gave up on his dream.

But the dream of flight is one that often refuses to die. Last month Knepp, by now a State Trooper with a wife and child, was again in a position to reach for the sky. On 27 April, he went back to the beginning, as a flight student at AvSport of Lock Haven on the Piper Memorial Airport.

Flying twice a week with Prof. H. Paul Shuch, the school's founder and chief flight instructor, Knepp began to chip away at a decade of rust, and found that his skills, though eroded, were not entirely lost. After just eight flight lessons (and two intensive sessions of ground instruction), he was back to where he had left off a decade earlier. Today he flew solo, three takeoffs and landings at Piper Field in the school's Evektor SportStar light sport trainer.

"That prior training paid dividends," says Shuch. "With only nine and a half hours of stick time, John was performing flawlessly, and was ready to kick me out of the plane. He also managed to study for, and pass, his FAA knowledge test during the past month. Now he's ready for advanced training, in preparation for the FAA checkride that will make him a licensed Sport Pilot."

Upon completion of the solo flight, Shuch cut off the tail of Knepp's t-shirt, and autographed it to mark the occasion. This ritual dates back to the Golden Age of aviation, when barnstormers frequently had to patch rips in their fabric-covered aircraft with pieces of their own garments.

The Sport Pilot license, in which AvSport specializes, is the newest portal of entry into the world of aviation, allowing prospective pilots to become licensed in half the time, and at half the cost, of the traditional Private Pilot license.

Piper Memorial Airport is the ancestral home to the legendary Piper Cub, arguably the world's first sport plane. Modern Light Sport aircraft allow pilots to recapture the bygone fly-for-fun Cub era, with increased reliability and improved safety.



John Knepp shows off a remnant of his t-shirt, annotated by his flight instructor with the details of his solo flight at AvSport of Lock Haven on the Piper Memorial Airport.