

Pilot school sees 1st solo flight

Mel Bole, 69, of Cogan Station, recently became the first student pilot to fly solo at AvSport of Lock Haven, the sport aviation training center recently established at Piper Memorial Airport. Under the supervision of Professor H. Paul Shuch, AvSport's chief flight instructor, Bole flew the school's light sport trainer aircraft three times around the Lock Haven traffic pattern as the plane's sole occupant.

"Mel made three flawless takeoffs and landings," reports Shuch, "marking a significant milestone on his way to becoming a fully licensed sport pilot. Though both of us were admittedly nervous, this solo flight was accomplished in complete safety, with Mel demonstrating confidence and competence."

The Sport Pilot license 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.

Sport pilots fly for fun, and are restricted to flying simple, low performance aircraft that comply with the Light Sport rule. They are allowed to fly in uncongested airspace, during daylight hours, and only in good weather conditions. The weather for today's solo flight was nearly perfect, with clear skies, unlimited visibility, and a gentle breeze from the west.

Upon completion of the solo flight, Shuch cut off the tail of Bole's 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.

After reviewing basic flight maneuvers with his instructor, Bole will next embark on cross-country flight training, leading up to his venturing farther afield on his own. His training will culminate in preparations for his Federal Aviation Administration practical test.