

Anne Giacomantonio speaks to junior gliding champion Luke Dale

THE WIND BENEATH MY WINGS

Luke Dale, 19, is the 2008 UK Junior National gliding champion. He has been flying gliders since he was 12-years-old and first flew solo at the age of 16. Dale is now training for his private pilot's licence having won a Sir Alan Cobham flying scholarship with the Air League. This summer, Dale also became part of the British team at the World Gliding Championships in Rieti, Italy. *Everything Aerospace* talked to him about his experiences of gliding so far and his plans for the future.

What exactly is a glider?

A glider is a non-powered aircraft. Modern designs use three main sources of lift to stay airborne. Primarily, they use thermals, which are caused by the sun heating the ground then radiating upwards in the form of hot air. They also use ridge lift – where wind hits a hill and the air is directed upwards – and wave lift, which is ridge lift on a larger scale that creates lee waves, just like surfing on water.

The record for the greatest height achieved by a glider is 15,453m. I have flown to 8,230m in a solo glider. The glider I fly is an ASW-24, which is a 15m standard-class glider with no flaps. It is owned by my uncle and his partner, who are both experienced pilots. I am currently working overtime to save enough money to buy a third share. Considering the glider is worth in the region of £38,000, it is a lot of money for a 19-year-old! At the moment I fly with the Lasham Gliding Society in Hampshire when



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I am in the UK.

How does a glider take off?

The two most common methods of launching gliders are by aero-tow and winch. When a glider is aero-towed, it is pulled behind a powered aircraft using a 60m-long rope. The glider's pilot releases the rope after reaching the desired altitude, though the rope can also be released by the tow-plane in an emergency. Winch launching uses a powerful stationery engine located on the ground at the far end of a launch area. The glider is then attached to one end of a long wire cable that the winch rapidly winds in, giving the glider the required speed for take-off.

How did you get started in gliding?

My uncle has been flying gliders professionally for decades and he took me for my first flight. I had a huge feeling of space because of the amazing visibility from the glider.

What has been the most interesting place that you have flown?

I really liked Omarama in New Zealand, where I worked for five months last year. It is a complex place to glide because there are many different climates and mountains. I have flown around and over Mount Cook – at 3,754m, the tallest mountain in New Zealand – with pilots from all over the world.

How did it feel when you won the national junior gliding title?

Winning the national title was something I didn't expect to do this early in my gliding career. Although I had been flying nearly every day for the two years leading up to the competition, I had been mostly instructing, rather than doing my own cross-country training or preparing for the championship. We only had two out of nine flying

HEAD FOR HEIGHTS: Luke Dale (above left, seated), has witnessed New Zealand's awesome landscape from above, flying over Mount Cook (above)

days for the competition due to bad weather, but I won both days.

What would you like to do in the future?

I will continue with aviation and I am currently completing my private pilot's licence at Wycombe Air Centre. You can have a career in gliding – as I have done for two years – but it's a passion rather than something you do for the money. I am interested in flying as a career, however. There are endless opportunities for trained pilots, and not just flying jobs; the skills you learn from flying – how to prioritise and handle multiple tasks – can be applied to a lot of industries.

What advice would you give people who are interested in gliding?

Gliding is subsidised for younger members and is a fantastic way of starting to fly, as it is the cheapest way to get into aviation as a sport. Under-18 membership is free at my club – as is instruction and glider hire – and launches are half price, so theoretically you could fly all day for £4. It comes with lots of responsibility though as you can fly a