

# Careers in Aviation

*By Al Pinner, Gulfstream G650 Line Training Captain*

A career in aviation beckons, but there are so many different branches of aviation that a prospective pilot has to weigh up their choice carefully. The traditional paths have been Commercial Aviation, Military Aviation and General Aviation, whether fixed wing or rotary, but now one of the most innovative and exciting areas is UAV operations. The aim of this article is to look at some of these options, weigh up their pros and cons, and decide how to get there.

## Airline Careers.

Gaining that ATPL is an expensive business, but the financial rewards from a career in the airlines are significant. But how does one get there? There are many ways to achieve the requisite training to become an airline pilot, whether through an integrated or modular course, degree level or apprenticeship training, or one of the structured programmes offered by several major airlines. But are you sure that airline flying is for you? Is it going to be worth that huge investment? Will manned airliners still be flying in 30 years? Before one starts on the process, I would highly recommend applying to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots to take an aptitude test. It is better to find out that it might not suit you on the right side of a £ 100,000 investment. Alternatively, some trial flying lessons would give you a taster and it would certainly show interest when you get to interview.



There are many advantages of working for the airlines. Airline pilots are held in high esteem, are relatively well-paid, have a high degree of responsibility and are well-trained – not only in flying, but also in first aid, conflict resolution and Crew Resource Management. They operate in a sociable

### Do you have what it takes?

Before starting down expensive flight training, consider taking the HCAP Pilot Aptitude Test. The morning examination costs £155 and is taken at RAF Cranwell. Your results are then assessed and feedback is given on how you scored.

Why not try your hand by taking some trial flying lessons, most flying schools offer this as an option. Alternatively gliding or microlight flying experience, as well as time spent in the RAF Air Cadets are all valuable exercises.

A career as an airline pilot can be well paid, but to go with the travel opportunities expect working the maximum permitted hours in a very repetitive routine environment.

Military flying can bring a highly rewarding career, however you don't get to choose what you fly and along with a huge commitment can have a major impact on your personal life.

Corporate aviation gives more variety but requires previous experience and long-term job security can be difficult to find.

work environment with constant opportunity to travel. It sounds idyllic really, especially with the discounted travel perks, but the downside is that the flying can become routine (it's meant to be unexciting), the business expectation is to work pilots as close to the maximum permitted hours per year as possible, and promotion is largely based on time although there is scope for career opportunities both in training and management.

### **Military Flying.**



There is, of course, the opportunity to be a military pilot. Competition for places is fierce, but the training is second to none and happily free, although one has to amortize the training for about 12 years, or about 20 years for a pension. One could end up flying fighters, transport or rotary, all of which can be highly rewarding. However, you don't necessarily get to choose what you fly - selection is both performance based and dependent on how many places there are on each course. The advantage of military flying is that it is very varied and frequently exciting. There is a tremendous sense of camaraderie and belonging, a strong sense of duty, great opportunities for travel and career enhancement, and the job is relatively more secure than the commercial world. You will gain flying experiences impossible to gain to the same level in the commercial world. The downside is that the commitment is significant and this can have impact on family life, particularly in time of recurring operational deployments. If you choose to follow the classic leadership career path, you will alternate between flying tours and ground tours in each rank. I flew in the military for about 26 years before switching to Corporate Aviation and I would happily recommend military aviation to anyone.

### **Corporate Aviation.**



After leaving the RAF I worked as Vice President Flight Operations at TAG Aviation. I was inundated with requests on how to get into Corporate Aviation from young people and ex-Military pilots alike. Unless they had an unfrozen ATPL, my response was always to try to get into the airlines first. Don't get me wrong, I personally wouldn't change what I am doing and I would strongly recommend Corporate Aviation, but it is ideal to have a good amount of experience in Commercial Aviation or the Military prior to switching to Corporate.

Direct Entry requirements for a First Officer (FO) with a reputable Biz jet operator are about 1500 hours and Captains usually require about 4000 hours. Building 4000 hours in corporate aviation could take 20 years or more as the average annual flying in this sector is about 200 hours. Compare this with a major airline where you will be flying about 7-800 hours or more a year and it is readily apparent that building experience is much quicker with an airline. It is far easier to get a job as a Captain than an FO as aircraft are typically crewed with 2 or 3 Captains and one FO.

The structure of a Corporate Aviation business follows one of two models: the NetJet model which is very much like an airline where pilots are directly employed by the company; or the aircraft management model where the aircraft is managed by the operating company but owned by a separate company or wealthy individual. This is the norm in the Corporate Aviation world. While the flying is more varied than the airlines, with lovely aircraft, a degree of autonomy and more operational responsibility than the airlines, you are employed by the company onto that aircraft specifically and if the owner goes broke or sells the aircraft, that can be the end of your job and you will have to leave the company, hopefully to be re-employed at a later date. Thus, there is little job security and it can involve lots of time away in hotels without much flying. Hence it is important to have plenty of experience to fall back on when hours become sparse.

I have only piloted a helicopter a few times on a course in the RAF, so I am not really able to offer any advice. However, it is fantastic fun and if I had the money I would pay to do it. The ACP will be publishing a specific guide on helicopter careers in the coming weeks.

#### **Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Operations.**



One aspect of Commercial Aviation rarely considered by prospective pilots is that of the unmanned air vehicle or UAV. While it may seem contrary to recommend this as a career there can be little doubt that this area of aviation is expanding exponentially. UAVs are the future and anyone who fancies a long and potentially very lucrative career in aviation would do well to consider training in this specialist area. Technology and automation in aircraft are already highly advanced. We already choose to use the autopilot for all the routine tasks as it frees up our capacity to perform other vital tasks. With higher order AI and the future capabilities that will bring, the scope of UAV use is almost unlimited. Autonomous flying taxis are just around the corner, self-driving cars are on the roads; surely it is only a matter of time..... Operating UAVs, even recreationally, requires training, and using them commercially is rightly regulated by the CAA requiring permits to fly. Becoming expert in this exciting technology driven field could yield huge rewards.



## General Aviation.



We have spoken mainly about commercial, military and corporate aviation, but for some people, flying larger aircraft has little appeal compared to the raw flying sensations of General Aviation. While it is not as lucrative as the airlines, one can derive so much pleasure and job satisfaction from being a flying instructor and teaching someone the basics of flying before sending them off for their first solo. Similarly, there are all sorts of challenges flying either single-engine or multi-engine, carrying out Survey or Search and Rescue work. It may be that aerobatic competitions or displaying vintage aircraft is your passion. **There are many and varied paths to a career in aviation and my advice would be not to tie your whole career down to just one portion of it. The day we stop learning as pilots is probably the day to hang up the flying boots.**



### Al Pinner MBE BSc

Al was educated as a boarder at Stamford School from 1973 to 1983 before going up to Kings College London to read Physics and Electronics. He joined the RAF in August 1983 as a University Cadet and on completion of his degree he went to Initial Officer Training. Following flying training Al was posted to be the first ab initio pilot on No 1 Harrier GR5 course at RAF Wittering. Completing the course he was posted to No 1(F) Sqn and at the end of the tour was selected for the Qualified Weapons Instructor course before posting to No IV(AC) Sqn at RAF Laarbruch in Germany. During his tour at Laarbruch he flew on the first RAF Harrier II operational missions over both Iraq and Bosnia in those respective conflicts.

Subsequent tours were on exchange to Canada on the CF18, during which he was promoted in 1998, and a tour as a Flt Cdr on IV (AC) Sqn at RAF Cottesmore followed during which time Al's tally of operational sorties surpassed 100, encompassing the roles of Reconnaissance, Close Air Support, Air Interdiction and Air Defence. Following this tour he was posted to No 20(R) Sqn again at RAF Wittering as a staff QWI, and subsequently was trained to become an A2 QFI on the Harrier. Al became OC BBMF in Jan 2006 after 3 seasons as a volunteer fighter pilot. After leaving the RAF Al moved into corporate jet operations and is now the Gulfstream G650 Fleet Manager for Flexjet Operations (Malta) Ltd. He has around 8300 flying hours, of which over 3900 have been on single seat fighters.