

Kathan Dudhela – My Aviation Career Journey (so far!)



I am currently the UK's youngest Flight Instructor and Flight Examiner, based here at Elstree Aerodrome. I only got my driving licence a year ago, but I'm also qualified to teach and examine for Private Pilot's Licence.

Here's how I became a pilot...

I started here at Elstree Aerodrome on this very airfield on 3rd January 2017. This was the day of my first flying lesson – an hour trial lesson and I loved it. I'd saved everything up for that flight!

I used to go to Heathrow to stand there with my friend to catch pilots as soon as they came out. We'd ask them 'How do you become a pilot?'. I think I asked about 1,000 pilots! Their main advice was to get a PPL (Private Pilot Licence), so that's what I did.

I funded my PPL by doing newspaper rounds in central London. I used to wake up at about 4am to deliver newspapers then come back home do the homework. Every week I could afford half a flying lesson, so I got one flying lesson every two weeks. My advice is to wait until after you've done your GCSEs – you need to focus on your education first.

Once I had my PPL, I knew I still wanted to stay around aeroplanes. I couldn't afford a flying lesson every week. It was getting a bit too expensive for me. So, I went to Elstree Aerodrome and started distributing my CV around. I printed about 20 copies and it didn't really have much on it, but I'll still print them anyway. I spoke to the Airfield Manager, Mike, and he said I can do some work experience.

I used to help the ground crew move planes and helicopters in and out, and refill the helicopters when they fly in or out – this was the best thing I've ever done in my life! I used

to come to the airfield about 7am in the morning and leave here 9-10pm whenever I felt like it.

I now do Freight Flights. I could be assigned to deliver planes either for maintenance or for another owner. I used to do free flights, taking planes back and forth for maintenance and I built lots of flying hours just from that.

After building about 200 flying hours, I thought to myself, I can either go commercial or I can either become a Flight Instructor. If I went commercial, I wouldn't be guaranteed a job at the end. I'd still need to look around the market and may still be jobless.

At the same time, flight instructors were in demand so I knew I was guaranteed a role. So I got myself a Flight Instruction Rating. On the 29th July 2019, I qualified as a Flight Instructor!

I then got a call saying do you realise you're the youngest flight instructor?! They said do you mind if we send a news crew!

I remember I used to work seven days a week. I used to fly sometimes for about 6-7 hours. My max was 8-hours in one day and I was shattered by the end. I had to get my dad to come and pick me up.

After building up 1,000 flying hours I thought about an examiner course. The thing is, you have to be approved by the Civilian Aviation Authority (CAA) before you become an examiner. So, I got myself an Examiner's rating and then last year became a Flight Examiner.

This summer I finished my last eight PL exams (like a theory exam like you take when learning to drive). That's the last of 14 exams in total.

I am now focusing on getting my Commercial Licence in Spain by the end of this year (2022) while instructing, examining and doing everything I can to fly.

You can start flying at 14, so start building up your flying hours then. You can't go solo until 16 and get your licence at 17. For a commercial licence, it is 18.

I would say the reason I am where I am now is I asked experienced people for their advice to help me find the right pathway. Take their advice and learn from their mistakes. Don't just ask one person, ask about 10-15 people.

If you get an opportunity take it...and then learn how to do it! Now, don't get me wrong, you can't just take a key and then learn how to fly a plane. It has its limits, but I've experienced this myself. I got an interesting opportunity to work at Elstree Aerodrome to learn the skills I needed.

So, if you get an opportunity take it and then learn how to do it afterwards!

Why not follow my journey on Instagram www.instagram.com/pilot.kathan and come and spend some time at Elstree Aerodrome.