

THE AEROCHUTE DIARIES

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO FLY A POWERED PARACHUTE?

Words **Tom Lyons**

Back in 2021, I was invited out to an unassuming paddock in Werribee to try my hand at a completely new way of flying. Jumping into an Aerochute for the first time was a thrilling experience, one that changed my perspective on what flying was all about.

To me, flying an Aerochute embodied a sense of freedom in flying that's hard to find anywhere else. There's a sense of playfulness involved that's maybe not as present in 3-axis flying, one that reminds me of another sport I love; skiing. Both encourage self-expression, choosing your line down a mountain or a pathway

through the sky, blurring the lines between sport and art. For me, that's what gravitates me toward this unique little sector of the RAAus community.

There are a million good reasons for you to try flying powered parachutes. My experience is just one of thousands of pilots coming from a wide variety of different backgrounds, each with their own reason to jump into these flying go-karts. We've collected some stories from pilots all across the spectrum, from brand-new pilots to long-time flyers and those crossing over from 3-axis machines!





A Brand-New Pilot

ROBBIE OFFICER

Wow, what an achievement gaining my Recreational Aviation Australia Pilot Certificate for weight shift aircraft group!

My first introduction to Aerochutes was at work a year ago, when a customer arrived with an enclosed trailer on the back of his mobile home. After some chatting, he opened the trailer and began to brief me on what this amazing machine was and how easy they were to fly.

It's always been a dream of mine, but I was convinced that the expense of flying wouldn't be achievable. The commitment to training hours and rising fuel costs made that dream out of reach. It was explained to me that this wasn't the case with powered parachutes. They have low running costs, and buying your own machine makes that goal a reality at a very affordable price.

So off on a Google tangent I went, and that's when the gears clicked in and got me thinking... I want to have a go! I found the Aerochute company and began to talk with Stephen Conte about what I needed to do to gain a licence. We set up a date for a trial flight to see the Aerochute in action. After the initial flight, I was hooked and have since purchased my own Aerochute with Stephen's help and good advice.

I have completed my training and now have my Group D Powered Parachute Certificate. I'm looking forward to the many hours of flying to come, it's such a great way to see the views from your flying armchair in the sky.

I'm having so much fun!

Robbie Officer preparing for his first flight.
Credit: Aerochute International



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Crossing Over

TOM McGRATH

My interest in flying began way back when I was still at primary school age. We were on a family holiday in Mildura when Ken, a neighbour and close family friend of ours, flew up from southwest Victoria in his Cessna 172 to collect my father, brother and I, enroute to Mungo National Park.

It's reported that my brother and I would stay perfectly upright throughout the flight, regardless of the angle of bank, as if we would simply slide off the seat and out the closed door if we didn't. I remember sitting in the café at Mungo, completely oblivious to the fact that I would one day learn to fly myself, but feeling very lucky to have been given my first flying experience. I've since had the benefit of flying with Ken and other neighbours, several times in fixed wing aircraft, and multiple scenic flights in helicopters.

It wasn't until mum's 60th birthday, when my siblings and I surprised her with a balloon flight in Northam WA, that I experienced a new form of flight. This was pleasant and a good experience, but quite slow and less exciting.

The next time I graced the skies was in the same location, but for a tandem skydive. Now that was more like it! My brother and I both requested to do flips as we left the plane, and our wishes were granted. We flipped onto our backs to watch the plane disappear, before going into somersaults, spins and what felt like could have been a circus act before the chute opened and we experienced both positive and negative G forces, hitting the ground with grace and a feeling of elation.



Tom McGrath after a successful flight. Credit: Tom McGrath

This would lead to me working on getting my skydive ticket after moving to QLD, a thrill that I thoroughly enjoyed. After several solo jumps though, I realised it wasn't for me. A couple of dislocated fingers and a very sore bum helped to cement this decision.

I went on to getting my RPC (Recreational Pilot Certificate), in a Tecnam. I do very much enjoy flying the Tecnam, but with the amount of travel I do through work and leisure, I wanted something that could be easily transported. Something where I could be anywhere, whether it be the Kimberly, the Flinders Ranges, the tip of Cape York, or anywhere in between, and go for a fly.

My first port of call was to try out a weight shift trike. After several hours of learning to fly a trike, I came across Aerochute International. After speaking with Stephen, the owner of the company, we arranged to meet near Werribee for what would become the first flight of my PPC Pilot Certificate training. We left the air strip/paddock with Stephen at the controls, and after ensuring that I was comfortable, he showed me how safe and secure these machines are. We did 360 turns, low flying in the training area and chased the kangaroos off the runway for our touch and goes. This was a lot of fun! We gained some altitude, and I gained control of the aircraft. It was a combination of some experiences I had from skydiving and weight

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shift, but better. The feeling of freedom in the open air, with nothing to inhibit my view – I was in my element. After just a few weekends I'd achieved my PPC Pilot Certificate, and my new Hummerchute was under construction in Melbourne. I took delivery just before Christmas and by the second week of January, my brother, my 75-year-old mother, my partner and other friends had experienced the joys of flight with me in my new toy.

As I said, I have experienced many types of flying machines, but the Aerochute ticked all my boxes. It's one of the best kept secrets in flying, so if you ever get the opportunity to have a go in one, take it and you may just catch the bug like I did. Enjoy the skies!

A Long-Time Pilot

GRAHAM LYONS

I took a Trial Introductory Flight in an Aerochute in 1994 and was hooked. From there it took a while to line up my ducks, but I was licensed in 1997. Later that year I was retrenched from my job and I bought a secondhand machine from Steve Conte of Aerochute. That machine now has 570 hours of service clocked up. Steve has consistently updated and added to the Aerochute products. Larger parachute, wider headplates and the new Hummerchute model to name a few.

Over the nearly 30 years since my TIF I have seen and experienced some magical moments.

I have:

- Flown coastal with beaches and seas, where you can see the laws of physics demonstrated by the waves.
- Flown in hilly terrain and seen snow-capped mountains (I needed warm flying gear for that!).
- Soared with Wedge-tailed Eagles in formation, who peeled off after they safely saw me leave their area.
- Seen on two occasions a completely circular rainbow.
- Taken land owners for a fly who know the ground view of their land so well, but get a whole new perspective of it from the air.
- Taken a geologist friend for a fly over a practical field area from his training, but he saw the lava flows in a grand panorama scale that amazed him.
- Traversed 3 states in a couple of minutes at Cameron Corner and saw the sand dunes marching off into the distance.
- Experienced the Sunshine Coast in QLD and seen the magnificent Glasshouse Mountains.
- Taken in untold spectacular sunsets, where the eastern clouds take on a soft musk pink hue to contrast the brilliant setting sun colours in the west.



An Aerochute coming in for landing. Credit: Tom Lyons

- Flown through the Lockyer Valley in 2013 after the bad flood and saw the effects of the water cascade there. Physics and flow dynamics were all plain to see.
- Seen flocks of cockatoos from above wheeling and diving, splitting and joining along a row of roadside trees giving a kaleidoscope effect.
- Flown through central Victoria in clear and calm air but could see Melbourne getting a proper

drenching from a storm. There was lightning and a very dark cloud bank and I had an armchair front row seat to observe it.

I like the peace of flying the Aerochute. The mind is concentrating on flying and forgets all the day-to-day humdrum leaving me free to enjoy the experience and the view.

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the capability to go and see interesting features. Nearly half of my flight time has been with passengers, sharing the passion.

I have flown enough hours now that I no longer need to fly in all weathers. I choose the weather and if I don't think it will be totally enjoyable, I don't go. This means each fly is bliss on a stick.

It is flying for fun after all.