



Gareth Pearson



Above: Gareth looks on attentively as Chris Monk points out pertinent aspects, then hot inflates watched by Pete Dalby.

When looking at locations to conduct a month-long training programme for our student, my wife Claire and I were considering options when our friend Javier Tarno invited us to come to Segovia, Spain, where, along with son Daniel, he runs a passenger ride company, Globus Boreal. Our friendship with Javier began in Myanmar where he and Chris were flying for Balloons over Bagan.

Javier described the area as ideal for training as there are cut fields as far as the eye can see, friendly farmers, efficient refuelling facilities, and a repair station if needed. After weeks of planning we were loaded up, two balloons on one trailer, and on our way for a 1st July start.

Our student, Gareth Pearson, who is based in Singapore, as an early Christmas present took delivery of all the required reading materials and maps to study for his five written exams. We maintained good email contact with various questions and answers flowing back and forth. The books remained a constant companion for Gareth right up until Examiner Pete Dalby produced the final examination papers.

We had allowed the month of July 2019 to undertake Gareth's training, but due to work commitments he had to return

to Singapore on the 23rd, which cut the training time back by a week! Thankfully Javier was correct about the weather being consistently flyable. We arrived five days prior in order to set up and do a couple of flights to get the lay of the land prior to Gareth's arrival. It coincided with Europe's big heatwave, which also brought along high winds for central Spain. Had Javier been right after all?

Finally the winds subsided and we managed one short flight the day before Gareth's arrival. All was well and the support that we received from the other local balloon pilots and crews in the area before and after the flight was warming.

Segovia is a beautiful city and sits in the foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama. It therefore can be affected by the early morning drainage, which does tend to subside after sunrise, and the ride guys normally wait to sit this out. However, to maximise our preparation and flying time, we opted to fly from a launch site a little further away from the city, where the early winds were lighter.

Most mornings we flew two balloons alongside, with the 90 'training' balloon and Claire in a 120. Javier had set up a WhatsApp group for Claire – Ballast Club Del Lastre – so that she had a constant

All photos © Chris Monk



supply of passengers/ballast from various friends and family. He also supplied an additional trailer and excellent support crew: our special thanks to Alvaro Cano and Angel.

We were soon into a daily routine of flying, followed by the debrief – in the local bar, of course – then a nap. Ground school and ground rigging/procedures took place when it became cooler in the late afternoon. Supper would follow in one of the many small friendly local restaurants.

Gareth's progress continued at a good pace and on the two mornings that were beset with low cloud and poor visibility it gave us a great opportunity for tethering, and a bit of a lie in! Nick and Sally Langley joined us for a mini-break in Segovia, which coincided with the annual Segovia balloon meet, giving Claire the opportunity to take them for a flight over the city.

We had allowed four days for Pete to conduct the GFT, and witness the solo, along with adjudicating the written examinations. However, whilst the day after Pete's arrival flying conditions looked good, the following two days were looking like the wind may be against us.

So within an hour of collecting Pete from the railway station, Gareth was sitting the air law exam in preparation for a GFT and potential solo flight the next morning. No pressure Gareth! The boy done good, so after an early supper we all adjourned in preparation for the next morning.

We awoke to perfect conditions and allowed plenty of time for Gareth and Pete to run through pre-flight necessities. Nick and Sally decided to stay away so as not to cause distractions for our star pupil. Cue Chief Crew Alvaro's arrival. As always he was on time, although that morning we watched him walk towards us across the launch site, proudly cradling his tiny, two-week-old baby daughter. So much for no distractions. Fortunately he had also

Above: The glorious sun-baked landscape of Segovia offers excellent opportunities for intensive balloon training.

brought his girlfriend along to take over baby duties after the introductions had been made, so then it was gloves on and back to the preparations.

As Gareth took off with Pete, we joined Alvaro in hot pursuit. After forty-five minutes we had a radio call from Pete asking that we 'stay close' as they were soon to touch down. This was either going to be good news or bad. Pete then requested an extra tank... Good news!

When they landed, and after making sure the farmer was 'very happy' *, we went to the balloon, where an extra fuel tank was supplied and Pete got out. Solo time. (*Although the local practice is not always to seek the landowner for permission to drive on to the field, we had incorporated the UK code of practice into Gareth's training for all flights.)

With the full cylinder strapped in, Pete joined us in the retrieve and Gareth was on his own. After an exciting forty-five minutes' drive we were close when he landed after the wind had increased to more than 10kt. When we drove up, we were not sure what was the larger: the drag landing or the smile on Gareth's face!

Champagne followed, then back to the bar for beer and tapas, where we were congratulated by the local Segovian teams, who had returned from another stunning flight from the balloon meet. Celebrations were kept moderate, however. The breezy forecast over the next couple of days was deemed correct and with no need for more flying, Gareth successfully sat his remaining written exams.

A big thank you to Javier and Daniel Tarno from Globus Boreus, Crew Chief Alvaro, and all the teams for all their help and support.



Above: Basket for one. Gareth Pearson takes off on his solo flight.



Above: Gareth comes in for a healthy drag landing to emerge triumphant.

If anyone is considering an intensive UK PPL training course, please contact Chris and Claire Monk, who will be running further events in Segovia in the near future:
www.chrismonkballooning.co.uk
chrismonk1@yahoo.com