

# The Pursuit of a Private Pilot License

## Ray Aviation Scholar Ben Varozza

In 2021, a friend told me about EAA, a program that offered discovery flights to local youth. That fall, I experienced flight in a small aircraft for the first time. Soon after, I started attending EAA 512's Chapter Meetings and enjoyed talking to experienced aviators and listening to riveting stories varying from military encounters to plane crash survival stories. Upon getting more involved in the chapter, members encouraged me to apply for the Ray Aviation Scholarship. I started soon after on an accelerated schedule, aiming to get my license before I left for college that fall. I started flying a Cessna 150 and flying with a young CFI. Things were progressing smoothly but slowly due to my CFI having many students. It was challenging to learn when I was only flying once a week. However, eventually, I soloed at the start of summer (pictured below).



After a few more lessons and solo practice flights, the summer was over, and I had to shift my focus onto college. I moved to Melbourne, Florida, to attend the Florida Institute of Technology. There, I am working towards a degree in Aerospace Engineering; a path I chose after experiencing my discovery flight. Soon after the semester started, I began looking for an EAA Chapter near Melbourne. I found EAA Chapter 724 and attend there regularly, though I look forward to my return to my home chapter: EAA 512. After finding

an EAA Chapter, I took a break from flying for a couple of months to settle into college and focus on the next step in my journey; the written test. I studied for hours daily, varying from making flashcards to studying materials and videos. I took that in the fall and passed with a score of 92%. After the distraction from several hurricanes, I started looking for a flight school or CFI to use. I talked to several EAA Chapters, called many flight schools around the area, and eventually decided to go with Melbourne Flight Training. This was a big change from flying with a young CFI to being enrolled in an aviation school. I went from being in a very informal, personal training to a very structured, rigorous course. Both have their benefits and downsides but are very different. At this school, I switched to the Cessna 172 with a partial glass cockpit, which unfortunately slowed my progress a bit; having to learn new systems, new Vs speeds, different handling characteristics, and many other changes. However, I quickly adjusted and began working to solo in the new aircraft. Another big adjustment was that Melbourne International Airport (KMLB) is much bigger and busier, being a Class D, unlike Placerville Airport (KPVF). Once I began my training here, my new CFI felt I lacked ground knowledge, so we spent a long time building that up. Along with more training in the air, I was ready. Early one morning, we flew down to Sebastian Municipal (X26), where I soloed in the 172. (Pictured below)



Once I soloed, my flight instructor left the school, and I was reassigned to a new instructor who is fantastic. He really helped me across the finish line and taught me many things that I had missed with previous CFIs. We did the night flights and then the cross countries, usually going down to Okeechobee County (KOB). Once I had all my hours, we began checkride prep, and I was ready to take my Checkride in early May, but due to DPE availability, I couldn't take it till the end of June. I passed the ground and unfortunately had to discontinue after that because the weather was bad, with severe thunderstorms in the area. After rescheduling the flight for the next week, I soloed a few more times to prepare myself but felt very relieved, knowing that the ground oral examination was over. In my opinion, that was the hardest part. The flying was the fun, easy part. I then took the other half of my Checkride and passed! I am now officially a licensed private pilot! (Pictured below). I am very grateful for the many people in the EAA 512 chapter who have encouraged and supported me through this journey and pursuit of my dreams.

Thank you,

Ben Varozza



