

# TOP END TRIUMPH

A passion for flying brings Jo-Anne Thorne closer to her CPL



Jo-Anne takes charge of a Piper Warrior

photos courtesy J Thorne

Aviation is part of life's daily routine in the Top End. Transport and delivery of goods around the islands and remote inland communities depends on it, especially when the annual monsoonal rains close roads.

Jo-Anne Thorne wanted to fly from the time she saw an aeroplane coming in to land at an outstation when she was a little girl.

Now the 25 year old, of Milingimbi, one of the Crocodile Islands off East Arnhem Land, is being groomed by the Mission Aviation Fellowship to fly as a commercial pilot. MAF Australia provides aviation services to remote communities in the Top End, PNG and parts of Southeast Asia.

Hopes are high that Jo-Anne will become the first indigenous pilot to work for Marthakal Yolngu Airline, a charter operator owned by the homeland council of Elcho Island – near Milingimbi. The airline is covered by the MAF's air operator's certificate.

Jo-Anne started flying lessons at 16 and got her private pilot's licence the following year. She is now working towards her CPL, co-managing the Milingimbi community store between flight training. Some 500 km east of Darwin, Milingimbi is home to a 1000-strong traditional Aboriginal community. Barges supply heavy goods to the Crocodile Islands, but aviation is the favoured mode of transport for island hopping.

Jo-Anne was born in Darwin but spent much of her childhood in Canberra, later moving to Cairns where she trained for her PPL at the North Queensland Aero Club on an scholarship granted by the Arnhem Land Progress Association. ALPA is an Aboriginal-owned company which operates commercial stores across Arnhem Land, including the one in Milingimbi. ALPA provides a range of community programs, and continues to support Jo-Anne in her CPL training.

Jo-Anne's family has returned "to

country". Her mother comes from Elcho Island, which relies heavily on aviation, with sandbars making sea transport difficult.

Jo-Anne shares her passion for aviation with the Elcho Island children, teaching them about aeroplanes in "mini careers days".

She is looking forward to flying types including the Gippsland GA-8 Airvan and the Cessna 206 daily when she gets her CPL.

"She's one of those battlers who keep plugging away but is not yet quite over the line," says Adrian Smith, chief pilot of MAF's Gove base. MAF general manager Ian McBride says, "MAF is excited to see local young people gaining the necessary skills to become more involved in their aviation service."

– Peter Markmann

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