

**BENSON: SHS program offers head start into aviation.**

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engaging guest speakers, and flights in private aircraft. Sisters Eagle Airport supports the Flight Science program by hosting Young Eagles flights, where local pilots donate their time and aircraft to give students rides.

“It’s a different kind of class at school. You get on a bus and go see a warbird museum and tour an airport control tower. You get to listen to guest speakers who were Blue Angels or SR-71 spy plane pilots. And you get to fly in a private airplane, and the pilot lets you take the controls,” said Benson. “Then you begin to understand how flight actually works. You can look out the window and watch how the ailerons are moving as you feel the plane turn.”

The second component to earning a private pilot certificate is flight instruction in an airplane. Benson began taking flying lessons with Brian Lansburgh, an FAA Certified Flight Instructor (CFI), during her sophomore year. She has logged just over 100 hours of dual instruction time, developing proficiency in all areas of flight, including navigation, night flight, various take-off and landings, emergency procedures, cross-country flights, radio communications and instrument operation.

Once she mastered the control and maneuvering of the plane, Benson was eligible to fly solo. FAA requires student pilots to be at least 16 years old to solo. Benson turned 16, got her driver’s license, and soloed an airplane all in the same month.

The final and most daunting portion to becoming a pilot is the oral and practical tests, known as the “check ride.” An FAA Designated Examiner conducts the tests

to assess the student’s knowledge and safety of flying an aircraft, and typically takes 6-7 hours. Students must be 17 years old in order to take the check ride. If the examiner determines the student is proficient in knowledge and in-flight skills, the private pilot certificate is awarded. The new pilot is then allowed to fly without an instructor, and can carry passengers.

Benson took her check ride with an FAA examiner last Saturday at Sisters Eagle Airport. The oral portion of the exam lasted 4-1/2 hours. When asked what subjects the questions covered, Benson replied, “Just about everything I learned in ground school and flight lessons. I think he was extra-thorough since I am only 17. But I studied for it, so I felt well-prepared.”

Next came the practical part of the exam. The student must perform a complete pre-flight safety check of the plane, and produce documentation as to the air-worthiness and current inspections of the aircraft. Then the student and the examiner fly together, where the student must demonstrate various maneuvers and safe operations of the airplane. Benson’s check flight took 1-1/2 hours.

“He had me plan a cross-country trip where the first leg went to the Bend airport. We did several landings at Bend, where there were many other

airplanes and helicopters that were landing and taking off. He could see I knew how to navigate traffic, and use the radio. Then we went over to Lake Billy Chinook, climbed to a safe altitude, and I had to demonstrate steep turns, slow flight, stalls, and recovery. Then he pulled the throttle for a simulated engine failure, and I had to show emergency procedures for how I would land the plane safely. By the time we got back to the Sisters airport, the wind had picked up to gusts of 14 mph. But since Sisters is my home airport, I’ve gotten lots of practice landing in a cross-wind. It’s my briar patch.”

The examiner was impressed. As he signed off Benson’s certificate designating her as a licensed private pilot, he exclaimed, “Even experienced pilots have difficulty landing in a strong cross-wind, much less a 17-year-old student pilot! That was a great demonstration of her skills, and made my job easy.”

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