

I learned about flying from that //

HEALTH MATTERS

When Geoff van Asch lost his medical in 2013, he became absolutely focussed on improving his health and getting his Class 2 back.



In early 2012, Blenheim accountant Geoff van Asch had a blood pressure test.

The result was 120/80, just about perfect. He was a keen cyclist, biking 50 km trips, and although by his own assessment, he was “big – 125 kg” he was not unfit.

Fifteen months later, at Omaka, Geoff – a Murphy Rebel and Piper Cub pilot – had a medical check with Healthy Bastards campaigner Dr Dave Baldwin.

“My blood pressure was through the roof – 188/120. I hadn’t felt any different so it was a complete shock.”

Dave refused to renew his Class 2 medical. But Geoff, in his own words, is “a determined bugger”.

“I decided I had major reasons to live – a wife, two children, and an aircraft I was just finishing building.

“So instead of sitting around complaining about my bad luck and the CAA, I decided to claw my way back to a clean Class 2.”

Geoff made changes to his lifestyle – “not too much alcohol, not too much sugar, plenty of green stuff” – and he put himself in the hands of a “health guru from Christchurch”.

Two years later, he was 20kg lighter, with a BP of “122ish over 76ish”, off all medication, and with his Class 2 well and truly restored. He was almost literally a new man.

Writing in the AOPA magazine, *Approach*, Geoff said, “Losing my medical focused my attention and forced me to consider my future. I lost a very close acquaintance in his early 50s with a heart event...” (Summer 2015)

“Geoff is an awesome case,” says Dave Baldwin. “He was one big unit when his blood pressure was spiking. Now he looks a bit like Sonny Bill!”

Dave embarked on his Healthy Bastards campaign because he “got sick of going to the morgue to sign off people like Geoff.



"I was thinking, 'what more could I have done to prevent this happening?' It was doing my head in, a bit. So I started the campaign to get those health messages out."

Dave says the greatest gift anybody is given is their body.

"Often you don't realise how important it is until it starts to let you down.

"For goodness sake, if you think you might be developing a health issue, check it out with the GP."

Dave recommends that pilots make the most of their physical.

"You're already at the GP getting a medical check, so load it up! It shouldn't cost any more to have a few specific things checked out.

"For instance, if you're an over-50 male, it's time to talk about your prostate. If there's bowel cancer or high cholesterol in the family genes, talk to the doctor about that. Get a skin check for strange-looking moles.

"It will reassure you you're on the right side of healthy. And if something is picked up early, you've got a better chance of recovery."

Dave says he also encourages pilots, who fly as a career, to get insurance.

"Pilots need to think about what would happen if they lost their medical, or had a heart attack, or a car accident. If they then had some trouble with ACC, they need to consider if they would be covered so they could feed their family.

"If they're covered, there's no problem exploring things with their GP that might be worrying them, and no worries about letting the CAA know."

Licence holders are legally required to advise the CAA if they're aware of, or suspect, a change in their medical condition that may interfere with aviation safety. GPs and operators have the same legal obligation.

Operators who are reluctant to report their suspicions about an employee's medical status to the CAA should ask themselves if they would be happy having their family fly with that pilot.

Geoff van Asch, who says his new philosophy is 'you are what you eat – and what you do' says he has a checkup every year on his birthday.

"Having my Class 2 pulled did kick me in the arse. It was a real wake-up call. To be honest, it probably saved my life." 🚀

// FLYING AND LYING (TO YOURSELF)

While an episode of pilot incapacitation is rare, it can be catastrophic, particularly during single-pilot flights.

According to recent research from Australia, 70 percent of pilot incapacitation in low capacity air transport and general aviation results in a return to the departure aerodrome, or even collision with terrain.

The AvKiwi Safety Seminar 'Personal Preflight' says, "Before you fly you always preflight your aircraft, but how often do you preflight yourself?"

"All too often we hear ourselves, and others, say 'I'll be right.'

"Well sometimes you won't be.

"It's important to make sure you are fit to fly, both mentally and physically. When you get into your aircraft there's a lot riding on your ability to perform well, when things are going well – and when they aren't."

So don't fool yourself, and check off your personal fitness as carefully as you check off the fitness of your aircraft.

That means thinking about how tired you might be, whether you remain affected by alcohol and other drugs from a few hours before, what your stress level may do to your decision-making, and whether you're sufficiently fed and watered.

Consciously evaluate your general wellbeing, and identify the risks of you flying that day and thoroughly consider how you will manage them.

Be brutally honest with yourself.

// FLYING AND LYING (TO THE CAA)

Apart from the safety and legal reasons the CAA wants to know if a medical condition is likely to threaten safe flying, Dave Baldwin says there's a further incentive for pilots to always be open with the CAA about their health.

"I've been to a few inquests in my time. Believe me, you do not want to have had an accident, and then the lawyers find out you've also got an undisclosed medical condition – even if the medical condition had nothing to do with the accident. You lose all credibility."