



Barry McCarthy has long viewed retirement as a time to get out and fly with the birds. Ever since his beloved wife gave him an air experience flight in a glider as a birthday gift in 2003, the skies above Caboolture, north of Brisbane, have virtually been his second home.

For Barry, it was a long time coming. Now in his sixties, the North Lakes Retirement Resort resident's interest in glider flying began as a teenager growing up in the small NSW country town of Mulwala, a short distance from the Air Force base at Tocumwal in the Riverina district of the state's south.

"It's a big gliding centre and, as a young teenager, I watched them and thought 'one day I'd like to do that'. It's the old story – you get married, you have kids and you do nothing until you have money and more time," he says, explaining how so many years passed before he realised his dream to fly.

Soon after the thrill of his first flight, Barry began working towards becoming a gliding instructor, which meant clocking up copious hours soaring up to 4500ft above the scenic environs of Caboolture, Bribie Island and the breathtaking Glasshouse Mountains.

He wasted little time, being endorsed as an aerial experience instructor in 2006 and elevated to level one and then level two instructor status in 2008. "Most instructors start off quite young," Barry insists. "But I just pushed myself through because I knew the years were against me."

While he describes the feeling of motorless flight as "unbelievable – something you've got to experience to believe", he says taking over a glider's controls for the first time was daunting.

"The first time you do it, you're all over the place like a drunk because you've got no co-ordination or sense of horizon," he quips. "In a glider, you've got to

think three seconds ahead of where you are all the time. Your brain, eyes, arms and feet – they've all got to work together."

Aside from the love of flying, Barry says the camaraderie he enjoys with other Caboolture Gliding Club members is especially gratifying, particularly since his wife passed away late last year. And he gets a real kick from watching the response of first-time glider flyers.

"The most common reaction you get is, 'I never thought it would be like this'. They're absolutely blown away by the quietness and the stability of it." ♦

High flyer

Photography Vincent Long

Only since retirement has North Lakes resident Barry McCarthy really had the chance to spread his wings, writes Andrew Turner.