

How much does it cost to buy and maintain a microlight?

Buying your first microlight

We recommend that you don't buy a microlight before you have got your license. Most instructors prefer to use their own machines for training, and the experience you gain on your course will be invaluable in choosing the right kind of microlight for you. Your instructor will also be able to advise you, and may even be able to come with you to cast their expert eye over your planned purchase.

Once you are ready to buy, think carefully about what you want to do in your microlight. Do you want to fly locally, or go cross country? Will you be a fair weather flyer, or do you want a machine that can handle slightly tougher conditions? And of course, how much are you willing to spend?

You can buy a flex wing microlight for as little as £2500. A second hand XL with a two stroke engine is a lovely plane if you want to bumble around locally at 40-50mph. A two stroke engine Quantum might sell for around £6-8k. If you want the power and reliability of a four stroke engine, then you can get a reasonably modern second hand Quantum for upwards of £12k. Second hand latest spec microlights with four stroke engines can sell for up to £20k. And if you want to buy new, then you are looking at around £30k.

Our next fact sheet will concentrate on the finer details of buying your first microlight – where to look, what to check, what the pitfalls are.

Syndicates

You can cut the cost of buying and maintaining your own machine by buying a share through a syndicate. We would recommend speaking to your instructor, or going through someone you know - most people would only want to share with someone who has come recommended, or who they already know. You can also find adverts for syndicates on the BMAA and Afors websites.

Volunteering

There are various organisations who need pilots to fly for them – hang gliding aerotow groups, scout groups, etc. As you know, you cannot charge for your time as a microlight pilot, unless you are an instructor carrying out training, but by volunteering you can have fun in the air at the organisation's expense.

Renting

Don't assume you will be able to rent a microlight easily – most owners will not be willing to rent to people they don't know. But if you've established a good relationship with your instructor, and proved that you are a cautious and safe pilot, that might be your best route. You are likely to be charged a rate that covers fuel, hourly wear and tear on the microlight, insurance and that makes it worth it for the owner to entrust his 'baby' to another pilot, and all the risks that entails.

Ongoing Costs of keeping a microlight

1. Hangarage

Hangarage charges can range from around £60 to £250, so it's a good idea to shop around. The cost of hangarage will be dictated by three things: the location of the airfield, the facilities it offers, and how you store your microlight. Generally, the more central the location, and the better the facilities, the more expensive your monthly hangarage will be. A farm strips with no facilities will be cheaper than an airfield with a clubhouse, cross runway, car park etc.

You can store your microlight three ways: Fully rigged, derigged, or rigged, but with the wing taken off and stored on a separate dolly. Obviously, the more space you take up, the more you pay.

2. Airfield Membership

Established airfields will expect you to pay an annual membership fee on top of your hangarage, to cover the cost of facilities and services. This will vary depending again on location and facilities. The good news is, if you are member of an airfield, you don't need to pay landing fees there.

3. Landing Fees

Most airfields charge a landing fee of anywhere between a few pounds (for small to medium size airfields) to £30 (for larger airfields, such as Biggin Hill). If you fly into another airfield regularly, you may want to take out annual membership.

4. Maintenance

You are obliged to have a yearly permit inspection by a BMAA inspector and check flight by a BMAA approved check pilot. Costs vary depending on the inspector – you could pay up to £120 plus expenses. Check Pilots do not charge, but may ask you to cover their expenses. The current cost of renewing your permit with the BMAA is £144.

You are allowed to do all your own maintenance, but should factor in the cost of an engineer if you are not confident/competent in this area. Any work affecting primary structure requires an inspector's approval.

Two stroke engines need a major servicing every 300 hours, with a decoke recommended every 100 hours. Four strokes should be serviced every 1000 hours-2000 hours depending on engine type, with frequent oil and filter changes. A two stroke engine will generally cost more to maintain than a four stroke.

5. Petrol

Most microlights use Mogas (ordinary motor fuel). As a very rough guide, you could expect a two stroke engine to burn between 13-15 litres per hour, while a four stroke might burn around 12 litres per hour. Oil costs vary depending on type, but the cost of oil and filter changes for four strokes is negligible.

6. Insurance

You must have insurance for third party risks by law, and if your aircraft has two seats then also for passenger risks. You might also want to consider hull cover in the air and on the ground, so as not to cause yourself additional anguish in the case of a prang.

7. Accessories

As a minimum, you will need to buy helmets and headsets for you and your passenger, flying suits, radio and radio interface. Costs vary.

8. Other

You must be a member of the BMAA in order to own a microlight (currently £65 per year for single membership). You will also need to pay a fee (currently £60) when registering your aircraft.

You will need to do a refresher session with an instructor every two years, and keep your medical valid.