

# PILOT SPOTLIGHT: GHADA BAZ

BY LIZ DENGLER

**I grew up in Egypt**, but I'm now based in Orlando, Florida, and I am an Egyptian/American dual citizen. I mostly fly out of a couple of airports located about 45 minutes away from my house. Of course, in the Orlando area, we also have a bunch of informal LZs, and there is a strong community where we all look after each other.

**I was raised around flying** and adventure sports in Egypt. My father, Nabil Baz, was a prominent pilot in Egypt (aviation royalty, if you will). It was his passion throughout his entire life, and he was instrumental in organizing an aviation club that got government funding for acquiring planes and eventually teaching generations of Egypt's best hobby and commercial pilots. The FAI awarded him the Paul Tissandier Diploma in recognition of his contribution to aviation and air sport in Egypt. That's how we, as a family, had access to planes and airfields.

**When I was young**, we spent almost every weekend at the airport flying, riding bicycles, and driving everything from motorcycles to fire trucks. When I was 13 he started teaching me how to fly a small plane. It was a normal family activity for us, including my mother and sisters, who all experienced flying and sky diving and continue practicing various extreme sports even today.

**I saw my first paramotor** in Florida during a beach trip I took in 2003 while doing my master's at Georgia State. I didn't know what I was looking at back then, but I was fascinated. It wasn't until 2019 that I finally figured out what it was. I was in a Ph.D. program and balancing a lot at the time, so I had to wait a couple more years before I could start.

**When I started learning** to paramotor in 2021 with Eric Dufour and his team, my goal was to foot-launch. But physically, it was tough. I wasn't in great shape because I had spent years at a desk in graduate school. I struggled a lot but wasn't ready to quit, so I finished training on a quad.

**Flying with wheels** took the weight off my body and allowed me to focus on flying. After I healed, I kept practicing ground handling, occasionally putting the motor on my back to see how it felt. One day, while flying in Egypt, I tried to launch on a compact trike, and the wing pulled me hard to one side. I instinctively stood up with the trike between my legs and safely reverse-kited the glider down. That was when I knew I was ready for foot-launching. When I returned to Orlando, I waited for the right conditions and took off successfully, landing on my feet. It was amazing. I fly both foot-launch and wheels now.



**My PhD is in industrial and organizational psychology**, focusing on leadership. Before teaching, I worked in management consulting with multinational companies, which gave me technical skills and sparked my interest in project management, which became a major focus of my career. I'm a senior lecturer at the University of Central Florida's College of Business, where I primarily teach project management and contribute to developing a management consulting program. I try to bring these skills to the sport whenever possible, helping create order out of chaos.

**I've applied my project management skills** to PPG in two ways that I'm proud of. The first is being part of the leadership team hosting Paramotor STOL Classics (the first paramotor competition in the U.S. in years), helping our talented pilots showcase their skills and exchange experiences with pilots worldwide. It is a sanctioned event by the USPPA, and we have collaborated with the USPPA president to refine the structure for this competition and future ones to prepare and qualify pilots for representing the U.S. in international competitions.

**The competition is scheduled** to start on December 8, with tasks running until December 16. I'm working with Leah Catullo and Reese D'Aquin, and



though it's just the three of us as the core leadership team, we have a strong team of volunteers in various roles who are instrumental to the event's success.

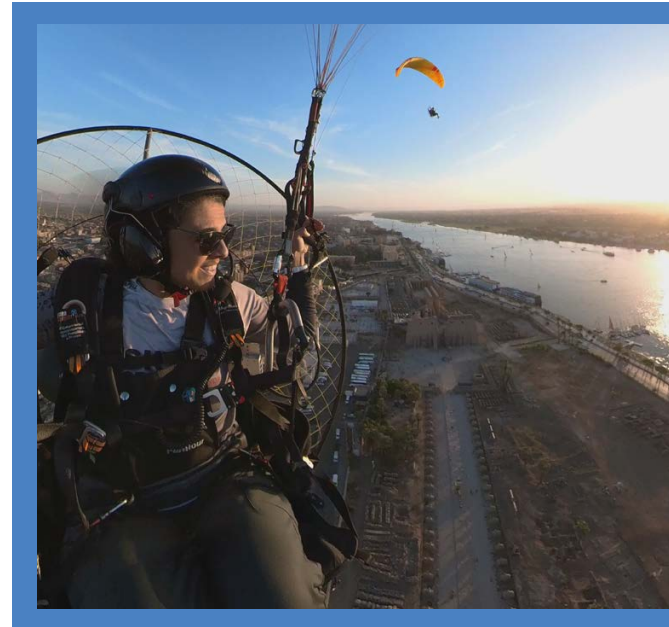
**For the competition,** we're focusing on accuracy tasks like spot landings and bowling pin landings, and we're adding a navigation task involving a treasure hunt. Leah has been mapping the treasure hunt, and we're collaborating with the Gaggle app to add features that can extend to other competitions beyond ours. The response has been incredible, with pilots flying in from Europe and sponsors showing strong interest. Our title sponsors are Vittorazi, Sky Sports Egypt, and Limitless Paramotor.

**Another way I've applied** my project management skills is by organizing adventure tours to Egypt for paramotor pilots and other adventure seekers. I use my connections in aviation and my familiarity with Egypt. Since I visit a couple of times a year to see my family, I figured, why not organize tours to explore and share exciting places and sports? I started my company, SAFARIYA (an Arabic word that means 'journey,' which felt fitting for what we do), in January of this year and organized my first group trip in March 2024. Right now, I have two trips planned for 2025, and some of my favorite pilots from our community here in the U.S. will be joining.

**In addition to all that, I serve** on the board of directors for Aurora PPG, a non-profit organization founded by Susan Ray to encourage and increase the participation of women in the sport. Our mission is to provide community and education through female-organized fly-ins and scholarships to help women pursue training at various schools. There are still barriers to entry and growth for female pilots, but confidence is key, and it's essential for women to learn independently and build skills on their own terms. I believe female pilots are making a visible impact in the sport despite being vastly outnumbered, and it is exciting to be a part of an organization that aims to increase this impact.

**Outside of work and flying,** I spend a lot of family time with my 10-year-old son, mostly partaking in whatever he enjoys. We do a lot of camping and hiking and enjoy kayaking and fishing. We also like to SCUBA dive together, and he recently became open-water certified at 10 years old! I used to row competitively in college, so being on the water brings back good memories. Fly fishing is my favorite. I used to tie my own flies, and it's such a rush when you catch a fish on a fly you tied.

**One of my most memorable flights** was in Luxor. We stay at a hotel on an island in the Nile, and the launch site is nearby. That day, the plan was to



**"I fly both foot-launch and wheels now."**

cross the Nile, fly over the Valley of the Kings, and head back to the temples of Luxor and Karnak. The views were breathtaking, and I got a little greedy and stayed over the temples longer than I should have. The winds picked up on the way back, and it became harder to make it back to the landing zone before dark. Instead of forcing it, I made a safe landing in a wheat field just as the sun was setting. It wasn't ideal, but I learned a lot from that flight and the adventure of getting back to the hotel with the help of some very friendly locals. I may have made one poor decision, but I am proud of the other good decisions I made to make it back safely with all my gear through the streets of Luxor.



**Learning to paraglide was on my list forever,** and I finally got to experience it last summer in Turkey. I'm a quarter Turkish, and when I heard about Oludeniz, it was hard not to go. I trained with a local school called Sky Sports Paragliding, and after a few days of refining my ground handling, they said I was ready to fly off the 1,200-meter site without needing a training hill. My first flight was in benign conditions. I remember

If you would like to follow Ghada's adventures, check out her Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/baz2earth>

If you're curious about joining one of her tours, you can learn more from her business Instagram and Facebook pages: <https://www.instagram.com/safariya.go> <https://www.facebook.com/SAFARIYA.ORG> SAFARIYA.org is coming soon

realizing that all of this was happening without a motor and having a moment of disbelief before smiling with the largest grin imaginable. It was beautiful and peaceful. I'm excited to continue that progression, one day do SIV, and start practicing maneuvers.

**In the next five years,** I want to keep progressing and continue flying both foot-launch and wheels. But I also want to take at least one or two trips a year to paraglide. The two go hand in hand, and paragliding builds skills that are very transferable to PPG.

**I want to continue advocating** for competitions in the U.S. and helping pilots connect with events around the world. I would love to see more of our talented U.S. pilots exposed to the experience of traveling and competitions. Though I enjoy organizing such events, I'd also like to reach a point where I can participate as an athlete in competitions.

**I plan to continue sharing** Egypt with the PPG community. I grew up flying over the pyramids in planes, and





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while that was part of my childhood, flying over them in a PPG is different. It's a unique experience that I think every PPG pilot should have. So many places in Egypt are worth sharing with adventure sports communities.

**If I could change one thing** about the sport, it would be an evolution of our training programs. I'd like to see more schools encourage students to train with multiple instructors, mentors, and communities. For example, I recently did advanced training with One Up Adventures, and I have been spending a lot of time around great pilots and instructors from Aviator. There's so much to learn from the different perspectives, and I think it's essential to a pilot's growth and mentality.

**For me, flying is about freedom,** exploration, and community. It's been an incredible journey, and I look forward to seeing where it takes me next.