

Still flying high - at 71

A GUTSY great-grandma, who was scared the first time she flew, is almost certainly Essex's oldest female qualified pilot.

Yvonne Vincent, 71, spent £8,000 and 150 hours training for her private pilot's licence.

The former Colchester maths teacher who has three great-grandchildren, 15 grandchildren and five children, first took to the skies in Clacton, but finished her lessons at the Anglian Flight Centre, Earls Colne.

The widow, who lives in St Osyth, said: "I was dead scared the first time. I booked a trial lesson at Clacton as a joke, really.

"I thought no way. I was absolutely terrified, but once I'd done it once I was hooked.

It's like a drug, you're addicted."

Mrs Vincent's only regret is her husband, Brian, isn't around to enjoy her achievement, too.

But her large family is right behind her. Her son, son-in-law and two grandsons even joined her for a 13,000ft tandem parachute jump in Norfolk when she turned 70.

■ Daring
- Yvonne
Vince



Mrs Vincent, a teacher at Thomas, Lord Audley School until 1995, had a lucky escape on one flight, when her engine started failing over Abberton Reservoir.

She'd just qualified, but still had an instructor with her. She said: "We had to issue a Pan Call, which is not a Mayday but the next one down.

"The airfield closes to everybody else and once you get down, they are on standby with a fire truck.

"The engine actually failed as we landed - it was a hairy moment."

Mick Manders, who owns the flight centre, said: "Yvonne is a first-class student. She's probably one of the oldest women still flying regularly."