UAE’S FIRST FEMALE A380 PILOT AIMS TO FLY HIGH

News / Airlines, Personalities

Her sister is the country’s first female fighter pilot. Her brother flies a helicopter.

So it is no surprise that Aisha Al Mansouri has become the UAE’s first female pilot of an A380.

Ms Al Mansouri watched brother Ali earn his flying credentials and join Abu Dhabi Police, then saw her sister, Maj Mariam Al Mansouri, make headlines as she led the UAE mission against ISIL in Iraq.

Ms Al Mansouri said that she also dreamt of becoming a pilot and realised her dream when she graduated from Etihad’s training academy six years ago.

"My dad always brags he has three pilots in the family," she says. "I think flying is in the blood. It is inherited and I think I have the best job in the world."

Ms Al Mansouri joined the cadets in 2007 before signing up to Etihad’s training programme, which allows prospective pilots to start from scratch and become qualified first officers in about 26

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months.

At the time, she was one of two female Emiratis in a classroom of more than 500 men, choosing a career in a traditionally male-dominated field.

"It was a bit intimidating," Ms Al Mansouri says. "At first it is very overwhelming, all the training. You really feel you have to work hard to keep up.

"I remember the first time in a flight simulator in the academy and you think, oh my gosh, there are so many buttons – I will never be able to know all these."

After graduating from the academy, Ms Al Mansouri worked as a second officer on the A320, before graduating to the A330 as a first officer.

It was then she made her bid for a chance to fly on the A380.

Anxiously waiting to see if she would be chosen to fly the Airbus, Ms Al Mansouri says it was a dream come true for her and her family when she was selected.

"When I got that email saying I had got it I sent it to all my family and friends," she says.

"I said, ‘I have got it – I will be flying an A380’. I was very happy and excited and my family were very excited – everyone in the UAE knows an A380."

Her inaugural flight on the Airbus from Abu Dhabi to London in 2014 was "very overwhelming", considering the sheer size of the plane and being responsible for more than 500 passengers on board, Ms Al Mansouri says.

"We do the walk around to check the aircraft and to see how big it is from the outside, and then the inside was really amazing. It was like flying a building.

"In the cockpit we have a camera and to see the amount of the people. It is amazing and overwhelming."

The lifestyle of her chosen profession is both the hardest and most rewarding aspect of her job.

"To be able to shift from night to day and day to night is hard work, but to be able to have breakfast in Abu Dhabi then lunch in London – that is very rewarding for me," Ms Al Mansouri says.

There are few places to which she has yet to fly.

"I have almost finished everywhere on Etihad destination routes expect South America," Ms Al Mansouri says.

As senior first officer she is second-in-command to the captain – a role she one day hopes to fill.

The Emirati is also hoping to have the chance to fly the new A350 at the end of next year.

"It is supposed to be the newest aircraft in the world so I would be very excited to be able to fly that," she says.

As Emirati Women’s Day is marked across the country today, Ms Al Mansouri urged women to realise that every field is open to them, but to pick a job about which they are passionate.

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"I think people must find a passion and love it," she said.

"I believe if you love what you do, it is the most rewarding thing ever."

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