

A New Flying Program Encourages Teenagers To Fly



Teenager Dan Sullivan (York, PA) enjoys a smooth, first touchdown with John Jenzano, BFI, Honey Brook, PA.



Dan relaxes as John collapses the chute.



Dan was all smiles before he even took his helmet off.

Everyone has heard the statistics about the poor quality of high school education in the United States. And everyone knows that kids have a difficult time during their teenage years. Delinquency and the peer pressure to experiment with drugs take a strong hold in high school.

One good way to enhance a student's self-esteem and promote a desire to study is to get him or her interested in aviation. A teenager soon becomes aware that study of science and math is required, and avoiding a criminal record is necessary if he wants to pursue a flying career. A student can be rightfully proud if he obtains an FAA pilot certificate while still in high school, and he's likely to become an excellent role model for fellow students.

The EAA "Young Eagles" Program

In 1992 the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) initiated the "Young Eagles" program. The goal was to introduce aviation to one million kids by the December 2003 centennial anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. So far, more than 35,000 EAA pilots have given introductory flights to 990,000 kids between the ages eight to seventeen. (For more information see http://www.eaa.org/communications/eaanews/031022_ye.html.)

I've participated in the Young Eagles program, and I can personally verify that any child who falls in love with aviation after his first flight is more likely to become a better student. However, the Young Eagles program is dedicated to simply introducing a kid to aviation by a 20-minute flight in an aircraft owned by an EAA pilot volunteer. The Program does not provide flight training for the student after that first flight.

What I'm introducing in this article is a means for a teenager to actually take flight training and obtain his FAA pilot certificate while still in high school.

The "Glider-Trike" Program

I am the founder of the so-called "Glider-Trike" Program. This program allows a non-pilot to undergo training in an experimental trike, take a flight test in the trike, and obtain an FAA pilot certificate. The trike to be used for instruction is examined by an FAA inspector and placed into the "experimental" category as a "glider" (or more appropriately, a "motorglider"). The reason the trike is considered a motorglider is because it is essentially a large, engine-powered hang glider.

Numerous articles have been written about the Glider-Trike Project. Articles have appeared in *UltraFlight*, *Ultralight Flying!*, *Kitplanes*, the *EAA Experimenter*, *Aero Connections*, and *Aero-News Network*. Some of the articles can be seen at www.ultraflight.com/JonThornburghFrame.htm.

Flight training is regulated by Part 61 of the Federal Aviation

Regulations. Under FAR Part 61 the minimum required flight time to be eligible for a "single-engine land" airplane pilot's license is 40 hours. The applicant must be at least 17 years old. To solo an airplane, the student must be 16 years old.

One of the good deals about glider instruction is that a person is eligible for a private pilot glider certificate at the age of sixteen, and a student can solo a glider at fourteen. Another advantage of glider training is that the minimum flight time to qualify for a glider certificate is only ten hours.

One of the reasons that the Glider-Trike project is so popular is because the minimum required flight training is only ten hours. If a person already has experience flying a trike as an *ultralight*, it is actually possible to qualify for a glider-trike flight test with only ten hours of *experimental* trike experience. However, if someone has never flown before, the flight time to truly be proficient in a trike is 25 to 30 hours.

The "Glider-PPC" Program

Powered Parachutes (PPCs) are one of the most popular and successful forms of ultralight flying. If you type in "Powered Parachutes" in the Internet search engine Google.com, you'll come up with 37,600 responses.

One of the reasons PPCs are so popular is a new student can solo a powered parachute in a single weekend of training, if the wind is calm. Like any other form of aviation, advanced training is required in PPCs in order to be truly proficient. But if conditions are favorable, at least a student can fly solo in the vicinity of the airport in a very short time.

In today's world of fast-moving MTV videos and high-paced electronic games, teenagers are primed for instant gratification. Since the learning curve for PPCs is so quick, it's a perfect aviation sport for teenagers. It takes far less time to solo a PPC than to solo a trike or an airplane.

There is no reason why a powered parachute cannot be put into the experimental aircraft category as a "glider." Just as a trike is a large, engine-powered hang glider, a powered parachute is a large, engine-powered paraglider. For the lack of a better term, I propose that an experimental powered parachute be called a "Glider-PPC."

The "Glider-PPC" program would be an excellent vehicle for getting teenagers interested in aviation. Since one can learn to fly a PPC so quickly, a teenager would experience the thrill of solo in a few hours of instruction. Once he's soloed, he's probably going to be hooked on flying.

Because a Glider-PPC is an aircraft in the experimental category, flight training in an experimental powered parachute can be logged as FAA flight time. Since the experimental powered parachute would be designated as a motorglider, the student needs a minimum of only ten hours to qualify for an FAA flight check. (The FAA considers "motorglider" training requirements to be the same

as aero-tow "glider" training requirements.) A teenager can legally solo a Glider-PPC at the age of 14, which is younger than he can drive a car. As mentioned earlier, he is eligible to receive his FAA pilot certificate at sixteen.

What better incentive for a teenager to study hard in school and avoid getting into trouble than to fall in love with aviation? Thousands of at-jeopardy teenagers throughout the country could turn their lives around if they became addicted to flying instead of addicted to drugs.

I therefore propose a "Youth Excellence Through Aviation" program, which could be called "YETA."

The proposed "Youth Excellence Through Aviation" Program

Here's how the YETA program would work.

The EAA and other national ultralight organizations have clubs or chapters throughout the United States. These clubs could recruit youth into aviation by contacting high schools, the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, newspapers, the FAA, and student's parents. Perhaps a high school or trade school could be persuaded to let a group of students work together to assemble a PPC as a project, and then put it into the experimental category.

The cost of purchasing the PPC would be borne by the student's parents. A typical PPC (including radio and optional transponder) suitable for training in an urban area would probably be \$25,000. If ten students joined a "YETA" club, that would amount to \$2,500 for each parent to buy a PPC. Twenty students would amount to \$1,250 each. The Glider-PPC instructor would be paid for his instruction by nominal club dues.

YETA clubs could be incorporated as non-profit corporations in each state. The PPCs purchased by the parents could be put into the name of the YETA club, and each student (or parent) would own a share of stock in the club. For ten students, each share would be worth \$2,500. The student would be free to sell his share to any new member whenever he wanted to.

The shares and club dues would give each student access to the PPC and whatever YETA club facilities are available, such as an aviation library, maintenance expertise, videotapes, and perhaps even a hangar. (The EAA Chapter 96, in which I am a member, has all of these amenities.) The cost of facilities and training might be reduced by scholarships or even educational grants. Manufacturers may be willing to sell PPCs at a discount to generate publicity and promote youth education.

Glider-PPC training, especially in an urban environment, would generate terrific publicity. Since experimental aircraft are allowed to fly over congested areas, which ultralights are not, millions of city-dwellers would see a PPC in the sky for the first time in their lives. Every time a student soloed or passed his FAA flight check, it would be newsworthy in the local city newspapers, aviation magazines, and in his high school periodical. Such news articles would boost

the student's self-esteem, recruit new students, promote general aviation, and promote the YETA club. Manufacturers who contributed to the program would also receive publicity.

The advantages of using a powered parachute for the YETA program are these:

1. No medical examination is required.
2. A student can solo a Glider-PPC at the age of 14.
3. A student can obtain his private pilot certificate at 16.
4. The minimum required flight time to become a glider private pilot is ten hours.
5. The minimum required flight time to become a glider *commercial* pilot (and flight instructor) is only 25 hours.
6. No transponder is required.
7. A PPC can be folded up and stored in a small space. They can easily be moved in a trailer to different airports.
8. PPC manufacturers may recognize the tremendous advertising potential of donating parachutes to the cause, or at least selling parachutes at a discount.
9. A PPC is relatively easy to fly and is reputed to be safer than other forms of aviation.
10. A PPC kit can be assembled in much shorter time than a trike or airplane kit.
11. After the FAA's new Sport Pilot initiative is promulgated the YETA program could continue. Students would train in PPCs for a Sport Pilot Powered Parachute certificate instead of a Glider-PPC rating.

Public comments are invited

Readers are encouraged to respond to this article with ideas and comments. Do you think it's a good idea to get teenagers interested in aviation? Does someone have a suggestion on how to get the YETA program started? Who would like to be the first person to put a powered parachute into the experimental category with a glider designation? Does anyone know a teenager who would like to be the first Glider-PPC student? Would you like another name for the program besides "YETA?"

You may e-mail your comments to UltraFlight Magazine at ultraflight@ultraflight.com, or write to UltraFlight at 2167 14th Circle North, St. Petersburg, FL 33713. We look forward to hearing from you.

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