

Gliding makes flying a peaceful experience



A Piper Pawnee tows the glider to an elevation where it can fly on its own. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MINDEN – Ten thousand feet in the air without an engine. And I only have myself to blame. I pulled that yellow knob and the plane with an engine went one way and we went another.

At this speed – about 55 knots – it would have been easy to pick out hikers along the Tahoe Rim Trail. Instead, this section on Friday morning was a vacant swath of dirt.

It was as though I could reach out and touch the treetops. We weren't really that low, but going this slow made individual trees stand out. That doesn't happen in a power plane or helicopter. We were on the crest of the east side of the Lake

Tahoe Basin coming up from the Minden airport.



Alfalfa fields near the
Minden airport

The lack of an engine made it so tranquil. While not silent because of the whir of the wind against the glider, there is no need for headsets to communicate with pilot Elizabeth Tattersall.

“It is such a thrill to stay up without burning fuel – to use just what Mother Nature provides,” Tattersall says.

She points out the iconic landmarks of Jobs Peak, Heavenly, Spooner Lake, Glenbrook Bay. The list goes on with a 360-degree view of Tahoe.

Leading up to the lake the tow plane takes us over the Carson Valley where dirt fields and those green with alfalfa, some square and some circular, fill the landscape. Large houses stick out – and there are many of them.

As we approach the Sierra, Mount Tallac is framed in the distance – while still impressive, it’s a bit dwarfed from this perspective.

I could float up there for hours just watching the scenery of Tahoe and her peaks – Pyramid with a dollop of snow; the lake shimmering in shades of blue that rival a Crayola box; the trees with stories to tell. But we must be back by sunset because this bird has no lights because it has no engine to power them.



Lake Tahoe and the South Shore from 10,000 feet.

Soaring NV has been around for five years as a school and scenic tour company. With the thermal patterns, it's a destination for people wanting to fly long distances.

Michael Marshall, who works for the glider company and is a pilot, possibly set five records for juniors earlier this week with his 350-mile flight that took him to Independence and back. (The paperwork needs to be submitted and the state must verify it.)

Lenticular clouds – the ones that look like a UFO – are common to this region in spring and late fall.

“Those are air waves. When that happens, it's like nature's elevator,” Soaring NV owner Laurie Harden told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A lot of what makes the Tahoe area difficult for power pilots in the summer is what glider pilots love – the thermal pockets. Those lift the glider, allowing a plane to keep soaring.

Mineral Peak, which is about seven miles from the Minden airport, is a location for gliders to head to because of the lift.

Tattersall sees the concave nature of the bottom of a cumulus cloud that is on the mountain side. That, she says, is going to keep this bird in the air even longer. It got us 200 more feet.



The ASK21 weighs about 850 pounds and can carry about 400 pounds.

For those looking for a unique wedding setting, Tattersall is also a reverend and has performed nuptials in the air.

Soaring NV will be at the Aug. 24 Lake in the Sky Air Show at Lake Tahoe Airport.

“I do believe they are the prettiest manmade thing in the sky,” Harden said of gliders.

While many of the aircraft at the South Lake Tahoe show are military in nature, gliders have played a role in this country’s history. They were used to sneak troops into France during War World II.

Most gliders, including seven of the eight Soaring NV has, are made in Germany. Because Germany cannot make power planes based on treaties agreed to at the end of the war, it turned to gliders.

--

Notes:

- Lake in the Sky Air Show is Aug. 24 from 8am-4pm at Lake Tahoe Airport. More info is online.
- More info about Soaring NV is online.