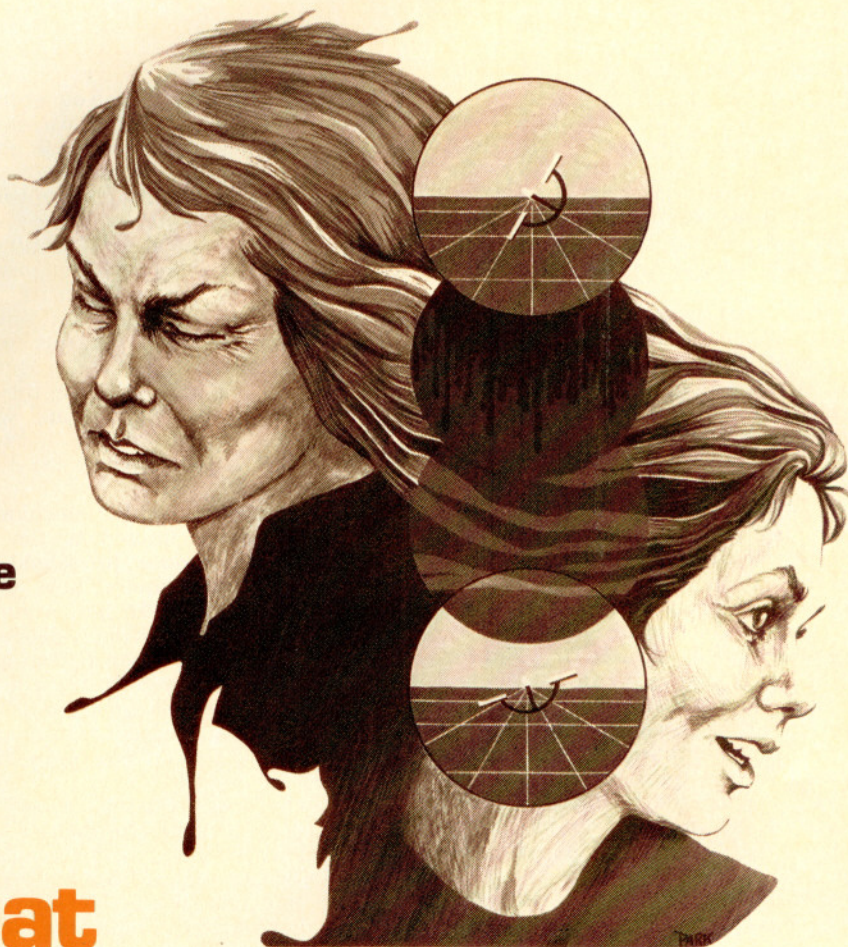


**Hints from a
formerly
apprehensive
wife on how you
can cope with the
nonpilot's**

Fear of Right-Seat Flying



■ Is your wife ready and willing to fly with you this weekend? Or is she afraid to even *think* about flying, let alone actually get into your airplane?

If your wife just doesn't like the idea of depending on mere aerodynamics to keep an aircraft flying, on welding and glue to keep the wings from falling off, or on you to keep the engine running, here are some suggestions from a former foot-dragger on ways to convince her that cruising around the sky is a safe and useful activity that the whole family can enjoy.

My credentials are not to be scorned: six happy years of flying in the right seat, preceded by ten that varied from downright wretchedness to bare acceptance. The reasons for my transition from misery to delight should be helpful to those countless husbands whose wives are like I used to be: nervous, full of irrational fears, and unwilling to trust themselves to the mysteries of the flying world.

My own first flight was a disaster. It was a beautiful, hot summer day; blue sky, puffy white clouds. Central Pennsylvania's Nittany Valley was full of up and down drafts. My future husband, Bill, had just gotten his private license,

and I was his first passenger.

After trying bravely to enjoy the awful sensation of being bumped around the sky for what seemed an interminable time, my stomach overcame my desire to be a good sport, and I got sick all over Bill's rented airplane. He hadn't even thought to have a sick-sack handy.

Needless to say, I wasn't eager for a return engagement. But not wanting to disappoint him, I agreed to try again. It was an early evening in the fall, the weather was clear and cool, and watching the harvest moon come up over the mountains was a truly romantic spectacle. Bill's flying habits hadn't changed, but at least the weather compensated, and I thoroughly enjoyed the flight.

After we married, the funds to fly were only rarely available. My moonlight-based enthusiasm waned, and I was once again the typical nervous wife. I didn't want to fly with Bill; I didn't even want him to fly—after all he was a father. But recognizing that flying was an activity dear to his heart, I reluctantly went along—as seldom as possible and always taking an airsickness pill to fend off that queasy feeling.

The end of my foot-dragging attitude

started with a flight check Bill took about three years after we were married. A very wise instructor asked him if he flew passengers the same way he had flown during his check ride.

"Is there a different way to fly?" he asked.

At that point he started learning how to be a "People Pilot." The difference was astonishing. Such a simple thing as a gradual turn changed from a nauseating experience into one that was hardly noticed. And as my stomach got relief, I became interested in how things worked—what the dials and gauges meant. My husband willingly explained it all—from the charts to the transponder, from the turn-and-bank indicator to the ADF.

In 1968 Bill bought his first plane. And as my interest and willingness to fly increased, he recognized the need for an instrument rating. With that ticket his skill and confidence increased markedly. There were no more wanderings over the Pennsylvania mountains, searching for the right omni signal and ending up with the "I follow roads" type of IFR. My confidence in his ability to get us there and back in one piece grew.

Our flights since then have included major trips to Montreal, the Adirondacks, and St. Louis, as well as countless weekend trips. Some have been in glorious CAVU weather, others in solid instrument conditions, with most falling somewhere in between. I have been able to enjoy them all thanks to "People Piloting."

What's your People Pilot rating? Are you still flying those beautiful 30° or 45° banks as you turn, nailing that wing to a fixed point and flying around it? Are descents at 1,500 fpm your pride and joy? Do you whip that bird around the sky in precision movements that are a beauty to behold, an instructor's delight, and a passenger's terror?

It's terrific that your skills are so super, but you've just flunked out as a People Pilot. Your wife doesn't like being swung around the sky at angles only a mathematician would enjoy. Try some nice gradual turns. So it takes a little longer; you're not in a race. And unless the traffic controller has told you to descend 1,000 feet immediately, there's no reason for the beginning of your descent to feel like the first downhill run on a roller coaster.

How about landings? How many times do you bump down the runway before you stay stuck? If your passengers have never asked, "When do we land?" after you're already moving towards the "off" ramp, you need more

practice.

Speaking of practice, are you working to upgrade your skills? That instrument rating will give you a lot more confidence that will rub off on your wife.

After you've convinced her that you're safe, the next step is the airplane itself. Have you ever shown her the plane's logbook; pointed out how often planes are required to get inspections; explained what the inspections entail; how often regular maintenance is done? You might show her the fuel gauges so she can keep tabs on you. Take time to explain what the preflight is and what you check. Ask her to walk around with you while you explain what you're doing and why.

Her experience with mechanical things is probably limited to the car she drives and various household appliances, and she knows how often things can go wrong. To her, a stalled car means a slight inconvenience; a stalled airplane, an utter catastrophe. She needs to be assured that, while engines do fail once in a great while, the overwhelming cause of accidents is pilot error, and that *you* do not make those mistakes.

When she does fly with you for the first time, make sure she doesn't look straight down at the ground constantly, especially if she suffers from butterflies. Looking out and down is okay; but straight down tends to make the butterflies overactive. Suggest that she might look up and out during turns, particularly ones to the right. You might also suggest an airsickness tablet. Have the ventilation system on so she gets plenty of fresh air. If it's too cold, turn up the cabin heat, but keep the fresh air coming.

Most important: Pick your day for the first flight as carefully as you picked your spouse. Check weather. Try for a cloudless, cool day when the air will be as smooth as glass; no hot-air bumps to make her wish she'd left her stomach at home. Mornings or early evenings are usually a good bet. If it doesn't look like a good day, postpone the trip. She'll appreciate your concern for her comfort and be more willing to give it a try when the good day does come.

Don't expect her to get all excited about flying around the pattern with you. Most of us who are not pilots look upon the airplane as a convenient, enjoyable way of getting somewhere interesting. Flying for the sake of flying doesn't turn us on.

Suggest some great place within an hour's flying time that you know she'd enjoy. Get out your aeronautical charts and, using your home base as a center point, make a circle encompassing those places within an hour's time limit. Check the airports within the circle and

find several that are near some interesting place to visit. Involve your wife in this process. Get her to make suggestions. There are airfields near beaches, lakes, amusement parks, tourist attractions, and restaurants. Pick some activity she'd really like and find a nearby airport. Make arrangements for a rental car, if necessary. Check AOPA's *Airports U.S.A.* for rental information and advice on nearby attractions. A call to the FBO may also be helpful.

Once you and your wife have picked the place, show her how you map out a flight plan on the aeronautical charts. Draw the route on the chart so that she will know where she is all the time by simply following the points along the way.

Explain what an omni station is and show her the instruments on the panel that will be tuned to the stations. Point out how you dial a station, how you know it's the right station, how you know you're on course, and how the dial flips from "to" to "from" when you pass a station. While you're flying, tell her when you pass omni stations and intersections so she can follow the flight's progress. Explain the other radio gear as well, so she realizes it's not by a quirk of fate or dumb luck that you end up where you wanted to go. Let her see that there is a dependable system.

If you use earphones, try turning on the cabin speaker so she can hear what the air traffic controllers are saying to you. There's nothing like knowing that someone "down there" knows you're "up here." If your bird is equipped with a transponder, explain what it does and suggest that she dial in the proper codes. The traffic controller's "roger, radar contact" is guaranteed to reassure her.

Certainly you aren't going to give her a course in flying, but do familiarize her with some of the equipment and procedures each time you fly, so she feels comfortable watching the dials and knows what they mean. Encourage her to ask questions, but don't push. And do be patient! She'll probably ask some pretty dumb questions—don't disparage her.

After your first successful trip, try another, and another, lengthening the times and keeping the intervals between flights fairly short so that her nervousness doesn't build up again. Even if you're instrument rated, keep to good weather. Getting her used to IFR flying is a whole other story.

There you have it—some simple ideas and procedures that should encourage her to give flying with you a try. Begin now to be a People Pilot and you won't have to wait ten years for *your* wife to say, "Where can we fly this weekend?" □