



Setting the hook

How to lure your kids into aviation

BY DAVE HIRSCHMAN

My parents tried to get me interested in learning to fly when I was a teenager—but I resisted. Sure, flying was attractive, but since it meant having to be around my parents, the price was just too steep.

I'd rather surf, and that's pretty much how I spent my youth.

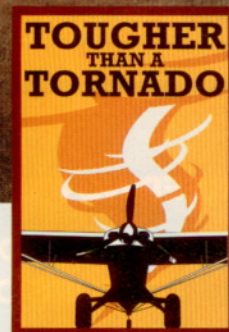
Now, the worm has turned, and I find myself thinking about ways to ensnare my own kids in aviation, and frankly, I'm having about as much luck as my parents.

My son, Nathan, now 12, used to get excited about coming to the airport with me, washing airplanes, and flying in them. By the time he was 6 he had flown in a Waco, Stearman, and T-6 Texan, among others, and he could

name an impressive variety of general aviation and military aircraft by sight or sound. But more recently his aviation fascination has gone into remission, and he only accompanies me to the airport when there's an airplane to clean (he can easily get all those hard-to-reach places underneath), or extra money to be made clearing snow.

This morning, however, I stumbled upon a way to take him flying that didn't involve any pleading, cajoling, or bribery—and one that he agreed to enthusiastically: a ski trip.

Sadly, it didn't involve landing the Tornado Husky on a glacier or the side of a mountain, such as you might see in a Warren Miller ski film. Ours was a relatively tame trip to Liberty Mountain, a ski area in southern Pennsylvania,



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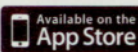
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which has managed to manufacture enough snow during an otherwise lack-luster ski season to make an outing worthwhile. There's a jewel of an airstrip (Mid Atlantic Soaring Center, W73, in Fairfield, Pennsylvania) at the foot of the ski area, and the shuttle bus will pick you up at the airfield if you call ahead.

Nathan was on the couch watching *Futurama* at 9 a.m. when I told him about the possibility of a ski flight. He immediately charged off to his room to get his gear (he keeps skis, boots, and poles under his bed), and was in such a hurry to leave, I had to retrieve him from my car to get him to eat breakfast. Fifteen minutes later, we were at Frederick Municipal Airport loading his 150-cm skis into the Tornado Husky's rear baggage area.

Fortunately, the prohibited area surrounding the presidential retreat at

ground-adjustable, composite prop and a 90-horsepower Continental engine).

By then, Nathan's half-day lift ticket was set to expire, so Forrester and I returned to Ski Liberty to pick him up. Nathan was tired from four hours of nearly nonstop ski action and gleeful at having made his first black diamond run.

We lifted off from Runway 15 and flew at 1,000 feet agl all the way home. Along the way, I asked a few questions that highlighted the unique aspects of flying and how fortunate we are to get to be part of it.

"What highway is that we're flying over?"

The answer, of course, was U.S. 15, the same one we'd have been on if we had come in a car.

"How fast do you think the cars on that highway are going?"

About 55 mph.

I had considered skiing too, but can only justify one expensive vice at a time.

Camp David was its normal, five-mile size. When expanded, it actually covers W73. The flight over mostly rural central Maryland was just 15 minutes, and Nathan spotted the ski area's white snow contrasting with the brown hillsides from a distance of 10 miles.

I asked Nathan to fly while I slid open the left side window and snapped a few photos. He circled the ski hill and took note of the snow conditions and lift lines as we went by overhead. We landed on Runway 33 and parked the airplane on the turf near the north end of the airfield. It's a bustling glider port most weekends, but on this winter day it was mostly quiet.

I started digging for my cell phone to call the ski area when Chas C. "Chuck" Forrester, a Luscombe owner and retired USAirways pilot, rolled up in his Toyota pickup and asked if we needed a ride. I told him I had a young skier with me who wanted to get to the chairlift, and he graciously took us there. As soon as Nathan had a lift ticket, I returned to the airport with Forrester. (I had considered skiing, too, but can only justify one expensive vice at a time.)

Forrester and I went to lunch with several of his fellow Mid-Atlantic Soaring Association members, toured the sailplane hangar, and did some flying. Forrester took me up in his clipped-wing Luscombe 8E (a sweet-flying airplane that's missing seven feet of wing and has a

"How fast are we going?"

About 120.

"Any stop signs between here and the airport?"

No.

"Was it helpful to survey the area before skiing?"

Yeah.

I asked what else was cool about flying, and Nathan added something I hadn't considered. Since the airplane has only two seats, there was no way to bring his sister along.

"She won't go on any black diamonds and always wants to go home after a few runs," he said. "I really liked not having to ski with her."

Hopefully, we'll have many more flights to W73 together—even after the snow melts. It seems like an ideal place to fly sailplanes, and doing so there would expose Nathan to an accomplished and spirited community of fliers.

And when he thinks about skiing, he'll remember briefly taking the controls of the Tornado Husky and the aerial perspective that it provided. Someday, that pleasant memory might provide the spark of motivation and self-confidence required to pursue flying and the indelible adventures that can come with it.

A dad can hope, anyway. **ACPA**

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