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YOU!

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THE NORTON TELEGRAM
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This picture of Travis Field was taken by Donna Tanner. Norton School District Superintendent Greg Mann liked it so much, he has a copy of the picture hanging in the school district office.

It's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's. . . Steve and Donna!

By **BRANDY LEROUX**
bleroux@nwkansas.com

Many people have looked up in the sky and seen it, but they don't know what "it" is. It looks like a go-cart frame, with a big fan on the back and a parachute over it.

"It" is a paraplane, and Steve and Donna Tanner, of rural Norton County, are one of a very few in the county who owns one. In fact, if the one you see has a bright, multi-colored parachute, that's who you're seeing.

Mr. Tanner first saw a paraplane at Husker Harvest days and knew he would like to have one. He asked another local owner for a ride, to see if he'd enjoy it. Around Thanksgiving time three years ago, they bought their first paraplane, a 2000 model that was built in Columbus, Kan., before the company moved to Michigan.

Mr. Tanner's paraplane is called "Aero Deere." As a working machine, he uses it to check on his cattle and his crops.

As a recreational vehicle, "It is absolutely the most relaxing thing I've ever done when the weather is nice," said Mr. Tan-

ner. He is teaching his wife to fly as well.

To get it into the air, the parachute has to be laid out on the ground behind the frame, and it is driven forward, at about 30 miles per hour until it starts to lift off the ground. It lifts off much quicker in cool air than in warm air, because cool air is denser, he explained.

The paraplane runs on regular unleaded gasoline, and the tank holds about 6 gallons of gas, or about 2 to 3 hours of flying time, depending on weight.

Paraplanes have one hand control, which is the throttle for the engine, and also the brakes for when it is on the ground. Before taking off, the bag used to store the parachute and its lines are stored in a little compartment under the seat.

"You never know when or where you might have to land. If you want to be able to get back to where you took off from, the parachute and lines have to be put back in their bag so you can 'drive' it back to where you came from," said Mr. Tanner.

Mr. Tanner says the best time to fly is in the evenings after the winds have died down, or

early mornings, before it starts to get breezy. Hot air rising from highways and other sources will cause "bumps," or turbulence, in the air.

To check if the weather is good for flying, Mr. Tanner looks at flags at the top of flagpoles and at treetops to see how much they're moving. The wind speed on the ground isn't always the same as up in the air. He won't fly in fog or if there's precipitation. "It gets on the parachute and makes it heavier," said Mr. Tanner.

There is a "foot bar" to steer the paraplane once it's up in the air. Lines to the parachute attach to both ends of the foot bar. When he wants to turn right, he pushes on the right side of the foot bar, which pulls the back right corner of the parachute down just a little bit — same thing for turning left.

Paraplanes can go higher than 10,000 feet, but beyond that mark, an oxygen mask is needed. Mr. Tanner usually keeps to between 150 to 200 feet, though he has gone up to 5,000 feet.

"It wasn't very fun up that high," said Mr. Tanner. "You're too far up to see any detail on the ground, but you can see the curve of the earth.

It doesn't even feel like you're moving at all."

Mrs. Tanner said, "It's amazing the things you can see from about 200 feet — wildlife, or even a football game from above. You see things differently from the air."

In fact, during one flight, they flew near a Norton Community High School football game at Travis Field. Mrs. Tanner took pictures, and Mr. Tanner sent one to Superintendent Greg Mann.

"He liked it so much he has it displayed in the unified office," said Mr. Tanner.

It hasn't been all fun and games, though. One year, while flying in his paraplane at the lake on the Fourth of July, Mr. Tanner saw a kid running with some fireworks. The kid set the square box of fireworks on the ground and lit them. "They weren't the kind that has the bright flares, they just make a loud noise when they explode, like the missile shells," said Mr. Tanner. They came within just a few feet of hitting him. He turned his paraplane away, and hasn't had it out at the lake around the Fourth of July since then. "When the fireworks explode, the air really shakes," said Mr. Tanner.

Mr. Tanner's scariest experience on the paraplane was when he was once checking the crops. He was flying in a feed draw when he decided to climb and turned toward a hill with corn on it. A gust of wind pushed him faster than he expected. Corn leaves and tassels were on his front wheel and feet. No real disaster but it would have been trouble to get out of there if he'd had to stop in a corn field.

"That's the scariest things that have happened," said Mr. Tanner. "They are very safe aircraft. My first take off and the first few landings were a little rough, but I have gotten pretty good over time."

Mr. Tanner used to get in 8 to 10 hours per year on his paraplane, and even though it's a hobby he really enjoys, he hasn't had much time to get in the air lately. Also the weather has not been friendly. The wind has made it a difficult summer.

The paraplane has to be inspected every year. Their son, Tim, a certified Federal Aviation Administration Inspector and pilot from Council Bluffs, Iowa, does it for them.

The parachute itself should be sent in to be inspected every 100

flight hours, which is very important, as there is no "back-up" parachute.

The Tanners have never had any mishaps in their paraplane. Flying it is a hobby they enjoy very much.



Steve Tanner is one of the very few owners of a "Power Parachute" in Norton County. Mr. Tanner said flying is one of the most relaxing things he's ever done.
— Photo by Donna Tanner



This picture was taken on the first day Mr. Tanner took the "Aero Deer" out for a ride after purchasing it. — Photo by Donna Tanner



Donna and Steve Tanner lay out the parachute and lines to get ready for take-off. It is driven at about 30 miles per hour until the parachute rises enough to lift the entire unit off the ground. — Photo by Brandy Leroux