

It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's a Trike!

Trikes take to the *Skies*

By Erin Dean | Photos by Erin Dean



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A What?

A Light Sport Aircraft (LSA), more commonly known as a Trike. They are sometimes called a weight shift control airplane. Interest in light sport aircraft has gone up in recent years – you can see it yourself simply by looking to the west side of Albuquerque's Double Eagle II airport on any given Saturday when the wind is calm and the sun is shining.

The local club of LSA pilots, the Southwest Sport Pilot Association (SWSPA) EAA Chapter #1521, is made up of about 28 members from multiple locations, mostly New Mexico and Arizona. The pilots in the club fly several different types of aircraft including Trikes, Fixed Wing experimental and Gyro Copters. All of these can be either 1 or 2 seats which mean a pilot can take a passenger for the ride of their life!

According to pilot and licensed instructor Frank Dempsey, the purpose of the club is to build community between the pilots. The pilots in the local club come from various backgrounds such as Law Enforcement, IT, medical and retail. Club activities include weekend fly-ins at Taos, camping along the Rio Puerco and assisting the New Mexico Back Country Pilots Association with maintenance of forest service airstrips

You don't have to own one to learn to fly - the beginning stages of the instruction process are tandem, with the instructor flying in the back seat. Once a person is ready to fly solo, most will buy their own aircraft. The cost typically ranges from \$5k-\$150k, depending on the bells and whistles. The average trike has a 4 stroke, 100 hp engine and can run up to 65-70mph ground speed.

The high cost of general aviation – \$70/hour – is one of the reasons light sport is seeing a boom – a much more cost effective \$15/hour. In addition, Trikes and other LSA can go places other small aircraft can't and fly at a lower altitude.

"Flying has been a passion of mine as long as I can remember. Even as a little kid I wanted to fly. When light sport opened up it made that dream a reality," says pilot Bryan Toepfer, the only licensed Rotax mechanic in the group.

"The perception that you have to be a genius or rich to fly light sport is just not true," says Chet Leach, another pilot.

"And we are all proof of that!" jokes Toepfer.

"My first ride was free," says pilot Ed Guedel. "The second one cost me \$30,000." For more information on the local club, schedule a test ride or sign up for lessons contact Frank Dempsey at www.newmexicotrikes.com. 