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CLUB AND ASSOCIATIONS

Magdalena Becomes Destination For ‘Trike’ Pilots

By John Larson
for [Mountain Mail](#)

[SOCORRO, New Mexico](#) (STPNS) -- The skies over Magdalena were buzzing with ultralight aircraft – referred to as “trikes” by enthusiasts – for three days over the Memorial Day weekend. It was the Magdalena Memorial Day Fly-In, which attracted 10 ultralights and pilots from [Arizona](#), [Texas](#), [California](#) and [New Mexico](#).

Sport [Pilot Frank](#) Dempsey, a certified flight instructor for ultralights working out of Double Eagle Airport north of [Albuquerque](#), said the area around Magdalena is becoming a favorite for the flying hobbyists.

“The airport in Magdalena has tie downs and a comfortable pilots lounge with restrooms,” Dempsey said. “We choose Magdalena for our annual Fly-In because it’s easily reachable from Albuquerque - 78 miles by air - and the hospitality is great.”

“New [Mexico](#) in general is regarded by ultralight pilots as the most fun place to fly,” he said. “There’s such diversity in the landscape and the weather is good for flying year round.”

Dempsey has been training ultralight fliers for several years.

He said the tiny airplanes, which can weigh anywhere from 254 to more than 1,000 pounds, are strictly licensed by the [Federal Aviation Administration](#).

Participating in the fly-in at Magdalena’s airport was one ultralight that weighed fewer than 254 pounds.

“That one doesn’t need to be licensed,” Dempsey said. “It’s classified as experimental. Most pilots fly the factory-built models. Those must be licensed as a light sport aircraft by the FAA.”

He said ready-to-fly ultralights can cost \$30,000 and more, depending on the size of the engine.

“A standard trike is powered by a two-stroke engine, but some use a four-stroke, which are the more expensive models,” Dempsey said.



An ultralight aircraft takes off at Guin Field, Magdalena’s municipal airport on Highway 60. The pilot was one of 10 who gathered at the airport for the Annual Magdalena Memorial Day Fly-In.

John Larson photo

The wing is like that of a hang-glider, “but powered by the engine and prop.”

Steering is done by moving the bar attached to the wing, just as a hang glider is steered. The average speed is 45 to 50 mph, Dempsey said.

“The engine burns about three gallons per hour,” he said. “You could travel cross country on very little gasoline. Theoretically, you can go as long as your bladder holds out. One ultralight pilot flew from [Oregon](#) to [Florida](#), with stops, of course.”

Dempsey said more and more people are becoming licensed ultralight pilots, and many use them for more serious pursuits.

Pilot [J.S. Ison](#) from Arizona said he got into sport flying because of his cattle ranch.

“It would take me 10 days on horseback to find all my cows, but I can do it in one day in an ultralight,” Ison said.

The fly-in at the Magdalena Airport, sponsored by the [Albuquerque Ultralights Association](#), also featured games for the pilots.

“One is the search for the Lost Adams Gold Mine, and the other is to locate the crashed UFO site near Horse Springs,” Dempsey said. “It’s all done using GPS coordinates. Just flying the expanse of the VLA is a real treat”

He said more fly-ins in Magdalena may be scheduled.

“The [village] is close by, allowing us to buy needed supplies, food, fuel, and seek lodging for a three day event,” Dempsey said. “This is a great little town, and we’ve made quite a few friends. We love it when the locals drive out to see what’s going on. A short formation flight over the village is our way to welcome visitors to the Fly-In.”

He said the Fly-In is the best way several pilots can get together and talk “trikes.”

“We’re just a bunch of people getting together, sort of like motorcyclists, but we do it at 500 feet. And it’s a lot safer,” Dempsey said.

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