



Cruising high above Eugene, Ron Daniels has no fear of flying

By BYRON ACOHIDO
Of the Emerald

"Cessna three niner juliet cleared for take-off," the ceiling speaker squawked.

The runway seemed to be gobbled up under the nose of the two-seater Cessna 150 trainer as my hand thrust the throttle steadily forward. The plane shook and the half dozen dials in front of me bobbed crazily. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed the air speed dial creep up to sixty. Suddenly, the Mahlon Sweet Airport runway dropped out from under the airplane and we were airborne.

Ron Daniels, the pilot on board, had to raise his voice in order to be heard above the roar of the engine.

"This is what the pilot of a jetliner sees, and what the passengers looking out the side windows never get to see," Daniels said.

Having never flown in anything smaller than a 747 jumbo jet, I agreed.

Ron Daniels, 24, is a free-lance flight instructor. Most of his pupils are students at the University who heard of him by way of a poster advertisement stuck on bulletin boards across campus. The ad reads, "Tied Down? Learn to Fly, Acquire a Skill That Will Broaden Your Horizon." When approached by the *Emerald*, Daniels proved just how flying can broaden one's horizon by taking this reporter and photographer Greg Clark soaring above the Willamette Valley.

From a vantage point 1,000 feet above 13th Avenue, the EMU appeared just big enough to house a tennis ball, and Hayward Field's oval track looked like it might fit on the back cover of my art history book.

Banking over the dorms, we changed directions, going toward the south, and were greeted by a panoramic view of the Willamette Valley. On the right, the winding Willamette River cut a border along the eastern edge of the city. On the left, an orderly pattern of city blocks spanned westward and appeared to fade into the Fern Ridge Reservoir. Straight ahead beyond the railroad yard, boundless miles of grass fields comprised the northern end of the valley, and in the distance a trickle of smoke rose up from a cannery in the town of Halsey.

"Learning to fly is simply an effort concentrated on developing the thinking process," Daniels said. "The whole idea is to turn control of the airplane over

to the student in an orderly step by step manner."

What would it cost for a struggling college student to learn how to fly?

According to Daniels, his instruction is a little cheaper than an organized flying school's because of lower overhead costs. But in terms of dollars and cents, it would cost about \$800 to log the required 40 hours of aeronautical experience required to obtain a license. Twenty of those hours would be dual flying with an instructor, while the other 20 must be solo.

Daniels contends, however, that money isn't the only hurdle a potential pilot has to clear.

"Motivation is the biggest problem as far as learning how to fly is concerned," he said. "I can't do anything with a student who isn't properly motivated especially in the area of study. As far as money is concerned, if a person wants to fly he's going to scrape up the money."

The two-seater Cessna which Daniels used for instruction is powered by a 100-horsepower engine. Going up in the air lanes with such a small plane might be compared to driving a Honda Civic out on a highway built for Mac Trucks and Greyhound Buses. But Daniels is convinced he's safer flying above Highway 99 than driving on it.

"I'm a cautious driver and I'm actually more nervous on the road coming out to the airport than any other time," he said.

Daniels thinks that, unlike someone driving around on a freeway, a pilot becomes the master of what's going on around him.

"A pilot is in control of what's going on in himself and he understands what's happening around him. So he knows his limitations and what the limitations of the airplane are. So as long as he's operating within those limitations there isn't anything threatening him. And the reason you're afraid in the first place is because you're being threatened by something."

"They say that flying is hours and hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror," he continued.

"The winter Eugene weather really wiped me out," Daniels said. "You can't teach primary students when the clouds are 800 feet, it's raining and the wind's blowing."

But for Daniels, cruising high above the Willamette Valley by himself or with a student represents the fulfillment of a boyhood dream. "Ever since I was a little boy, I always wanted to fly," he said.



Photos by Greg Clark