

Balloon ride peaceful, relaxing

By Debbie Robertson
Battalion Reporter

What weighs a little over 3 tons, is 70 feet high, psychede-



Photo by Brian Tate

Dr. Richard Morse and his wife Ruby take off in their multi-colored hot-air balloon.

lic, and floats through the air with the greatest of ease?

A hot air balloon, of course. Granted, not all balloons are psychedelic, but the one Dr. Richard Morse and his wife Ruby own is.

"We've been flying for about two and a half years," Morse, a petroleum engineering professor at Texas A&M University, said. "The most I like about it is flying it. It's the total peacefulness. It's totally different. You get hooked on it."

Morse said he and his wife bought the balloon two and a half years ago because, "We went crazy. We took a couple of rides in a friend's of ours and we went out and bought one."

The initial cost of the balloon and basket is about \$14,000, and the estimated cost of travelling is \$10 per hour, which covers the propane put in tanks attached to the basket.

The balloon is really just a bag of hot air, Morse said. He explained that the 77,000 cubic foot reinforced nylon envelope, which weighs 200 pounds and holds three tons of air, is stretched out on a large surface to be filled. The Morses use the

Anderson Park soccer field for launching their balloon.

Once laid out, a fan fills the balloon with cold air. When full, a propane heater (160 pounds) is used to heat the inside. When the air inside is warm, it remains stationary. When hot, the balloon lifts.

"It depends on the temperature," Morse said. "The air in the balloon should be around 250 degrees, 275 degrees at the absolute maximum. If it is 50 degrees outside, you have 200 degrees to work with. The more you have to work with the better."

The balloon takes 15-20 minutes to assemble and about 10-15 minutes to disassemble. Both operations use three or more people, depending on the wind.

The best time to go up is early morning or early evening. "It's too hot to go up in the afternoon," Morse added. The hotter the weather, the more heat it takes for the balloon to rise. "And, if you fly at the right conditions," Morse said, "they're super, super safe."

The Morses travel everywhere in their balloon. "You almost never go the same place twice. We travel wherever the wind takes us. You can't turn back. You don't want to," Morse said.

They have traveled to Normangee, Hearne, and other surrounding areas. "When you want to go a different direction," he said, "you find out where the wind direction changes and drive it." This is done by lifting or lowering the balloon.

The height record in their floating hobby is 53,000 feet, though they prefer to travel at treetop level. There, they can see rabbits, foxes, and deer. Morse, not a hunter, said he saw 25 deer at one time. His wife was quick to add no firearms of any kind are allowed in a balloon.

Though they can go everywhere, they are not to get within five miles of a Federal Aviation Administration tower (airport) during bad weather such as fog or rain.

As the balloon travels, a chase car follows. This car is supposed to be at a site where the balloon is to land, but the car has no available roads to travel. Sometimes the balloon is lost.

"We have a lost balloon number," Mrs. Morse said. If the balloon and car separate, they both call the number so they know where to find each other.

Landing is another story. "We meet totally different people. We just drop in on 'em," Morse said. They find friendly people who look forward to seeing them land in their fields. "You meet people that you normally wouldn't run into," Morse added.

To fly solo in a balloon, a pilot must have a student license. One must be over 14 years old, take 10 hours total of instruction, pass a Federal Aeronautics Administration written exam, and have a check ride with an FAA official.

To fly with others, one must pass all the above requirements and be over 16 years old.

The written examination is given at the General Aviation District Office (GADO) at Houston's Hobby Airport.

Morse gives prospective fliers ballooning lessons. If he feels the student could successfully fly on his own with only six hours of training, the student can fly four hours solo to complete the total 10 hours.

The check ride is given by an FAA official stationed in Houston.

The Morses' passenger rate is \$125 per hour. "We can have 1 to 3 people on a \$125 rate," Mrs. Morse said. A load of between 500 and 800 pounds can go up, and the ride would take about two hours depending on passenger weight and temperature.

For those interested in ballooning, Morse suggests, "If you don't have a balloon, get one!" The couple plans to purchase a second balloon soon.

Mrs. Morse added, "I love it! your hair doesn't even ruffle because you're going with the wind."

Since the Morses also sell balloons, those interested in buying one can call them at 696-8149.

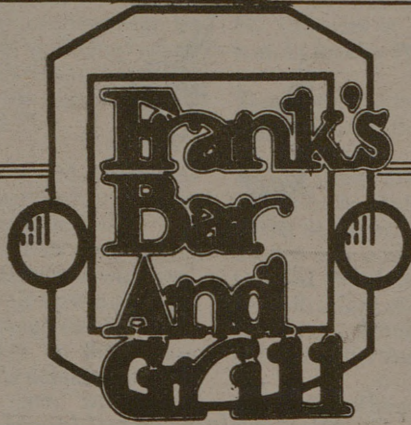
Six Flags still open weekends

Summer may be gone, but the fun isn't over yet. Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington is open every Saturday and Sunday this fall until the end of November.

The theme park welcomed its two millionth visitor of the 1981 season during the last week of August — the last week of daily operation.

Attendance at the state's most-visited tourist attraction averaged just over 15,000 guests per day, compared to slightly less than 14,000 per day in 1980.

Six Flags' general manager, Ray Williams, said, "We expect rather healthy attendance during the fall months. Over our 21 seasons of operation many of our regular guests have found that the park is most enjoyable at this time of year."



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