

The world as seen from a Cessna

As I stood looking out onto the runway, the reoccurring question of how those big heavy planes actually fly ran through my mind once again.

The sky was a beautiful blue and only a few clouds could be found.

It was a perfect day for flying.

I climbed into the right side of the plane and thought about the ride I was about to take.

This Cessna 172 was a four-seater plane with sharp maroon, gray and white markings. But outside decorations aren't really that important in the air unless you are at war.

Waiting patiently as the pilot checked the outside parts of the plane and inside the cockpit, I scanned what seemed like hundreds of dials, gages, buttons and controls.

I tried to make some sense of them, just in case I would have to take over in an emergency. What if for some reason I had to fly the plane? Which dials should I check? How do I talk on the radio? And the more I panicked, the more and more confusing it got.

Despite my doubts, an excitement of adventure and sensation took root.

As the pilot climbed in, he went carefully over every element of the check list and explained that seatbelts must be worn on take off and landing and to stay clear of the pedals and controls.

No arguments from me.

He started the engines and the tiny plane shook like crazy. The radio inside the cockpit ran with a constant stream of voices using a series of numbers, letters, and phrases to communicate. It was a completely foreign language to me — I just hoped the pilot could understand.

As we taxied to the runway and awaited our turn to take off, I felt almost a part of the small aircraft. In contrast to riding on a commercial plane where a passenger feels more like a passenger

on a bus in the sky, the small Cessna gave the feeling that we were part of an oversized bird.

We turned out onto the runway and the sound of the engines took control, the plane gained speed and soon we lifted gently off the ground.

The earth went farther and farther away and as the buildings shrunk, the trees became speckles on a giant blanket of green.

I lost all interest in the instruments on the dash and strained every which way to see the beautiful land below me. I was no longer a part of the activities going on in the world. I felt alone, but not lonely.

Despite the screaming engines and the chattering radio, it was peaceful. I was all wrapped up in my thoughts, and I somehow gained a new perspective on things.

We swung around over Olsen field and I stared at the crowd of fans who had gathered to watch the Aggie baseball team. Each one of them had their own lives, their own hopes, and their own goals.

We passed over the stadium and the plane began to descend. The objects on the ground grew bigger and bigger.

The plane quickly approached the runway and we worked into a collection of planes landing and taking off. Timing was crucial, and I squeezed my notebook as I tried to keep my attention on the instruments, the radio, the other planes and the conditions. I prayed the pilot knew what needed the most focus.

The wheels skimmed the black streaked runway with ease, and once again we were going along at the same speed we are all used to.

It's funny how the reality sets in. You are back where you started, the same problems, the same things to get done — and the same world you were just on top of.

—Terri Welch

need is determination and a desire to have fun."

So what goes through a pilot's mind while flying?

"Where is the nearest emergency landing strip?" Walters says.

"You aren't constantly looking for a place to land, but it is something you keep in mind," she says.

Pate says it depends on the reason he is flying that day.

"I take my flying more seriously than most people do," he says. "I do everything by the book. I'm real big on safety."

On a good day when he is taking his friends up for a joy ride, Pate says, his mind is still on his flying, but he is more relaxed.

"You always have to pay attention, no matter what. You are always

watching something," he says.

"It is an unusual and hard hobby to get into," Walters says of flying. "But most people think it's neat when you tell them about it."

Walters says it is her dad who has been her biggest influence.

"My dad was a naval aviator and now flies for a commercial airline," she says. "We share stories all the time."

She starts laughing and says, "You can ask him anything and he knows the answer."

Pate says, "I know, it's like they're god or something!"

"I can usually catch my dad on private pilot regulations," Walters says. "But he pays more attention to them now that I have my license."

"My dad has been very encouraging, and so has my mom," Walters says. "She was real worried at first."

Out of about 130 members in the flying club, Walters says, there are probably a dozen women.

"I never thought of a difference between men and women pilots," she says. "I have just thought of everyone as fellow pilots."

She says you meet all different kinds of people who are flying for all different types of reasons.

She agrees with Pate that money is a common problem with the hobby, but says there is a feeling of power in flying.

"Whether you live or die depends on you," she says.

Pate agrees and adds, "You look

down on your problems instead of everything looking down on you. You are away from everything."

He also says, "People get scared of flying, but I tell them as the pilot, I'm not going to do something that will endanger my life."

Walters says that flying is strictly for fun, and she is not in it to earn money.

"It is a limitless hobby," she says.

As soon as the words left her mouth the conversation is broken by a piercing roar of engines. Both Pate and Walters strain to see out the line of windows.

As a sleek leer jet leaves the ground, Walters is all smiles and Pate is saying "Oh, how beautiful!"

Their love for flying is no secret.