

A Fluid-Borne Lifestyle

John Heiney's 2009 Interview with Doug Newby

Doug Newby is a long-time Torrey pilot who's interest in flight began while watching his red-tail hawk, which he was training as a falconer in the seventies. His friend was training a great horned owl at the time. Doug tried to fly the just-assembled kit his friend had bought. The birds must have laughed at the result.

Doug is a philosophical free-spirit who lives on his self-built sailboat in San Diego Bay. He has spent a great deal of time at Torrey Pines over the years; hence, has taken in the evolution of the site from his own quiet perspective. Doug has many stories to tell of the rich history of human flight at these cliffs. The following contains a few of them:

JH: When did you start flying hang gliders?

DN: 1977



Doug Newby at the Torrey Pines Gliderport in 2009



Doug Newby Flying his Trike in West Virginia

JH:

Why have you continued to fly so long?

DN: What else is there to do? (laughs)

JH: Do you fly any other aircraft?

DN: I built a trike.

JH: When were you born?

DN: 1954

JH: Where were you born?

DN: Washington State.

JH: Where do you live?

DN: Right here. (laughs) I have lived on my sailboat here in the Harbor of San Diego since 1982. I bought it partially-built

and finished it. I have been sailing it and living on it ever since.

JH: Where did you first fly hang gliders?

DN: The dunes at Cantamar, Mexico. I saw someone teaching there and I think they let me run down the dune with their glider once. Later I saw people flying at Torrey Pines and started flying there.

JH: Who was your instructor?

DN: I didn't have an instructor. But Falcon Eagles was a mentor to me. I thought I was ready to fly Torrey, but I didn't know how to do circles or land or anything. So Falcon said "let's go to Elsinore" and he threw me off there. I was all freaked out 'cause I had never been so high before. But it was just what I needed.

JH: Have you had any serious injuries?

DN: No.

JH: Do you know how many hours you have?

DN: Thousands, but I don't know how many.



Doug Newby with his float trike and his sailboat.

JH: Do you have a most memorable flight?

DN: I did some tandem flying in Bali. I took my girlfriend tandem on the cliff there by the hotel, and did the first ever top-landing. The poor local kids would earn money breaking down people's gliders and hauling them up the cliff trail, so they were not as thrilled about my top-landing as I was. (laughs)

JH: Do you have a favorite flying site?

DN: Probably Torrey, (laughs) cause it's convenient.

JH: If you could change anything in your life, what would you change?

DN: I really don't have any regrets. I have had some good adventures. I have taken my hang glider on the boat and sailed to the Sea of Cortez. I found a windward cliff on an island, carried the glider up, set up and soared the free ocean wind.

JH: Do you have children?

DN: No. (laughs) I got lucky there.

JH: When did you first come to Torrey Pines?

DN: The late seventies.

JH: Tell me about that time. What glider were you flying? Who else was flying there then?

DN: I remember Jack Martin was there because I bought his old Cal glider. Billy Floyd, Leif Backie, Steve Mawhinney, Brad Hall, Donita and Dave Kilbourne, Burke Ewing, Pork...

JH: What does hang gliding mean to you?

DN: It is not just the dynamics of flight. It is more like a spirit of a conscious realm of a different perspective on Life. It just gives you a different perspective on everything. That is the dream of Man to fly like a bird. It is the purest form of flight. It gives me a different dimension of how you are thinking about and seeing the World.

JH: Have you ever worked for a hang glider manufacturer?



Doug Newby at Lake Elsinore with his Semsor



Pre-Grass Days at Torrey (circa 1984)



Doug with his Soarmaster equipped Electra Floater 205

DN: Yes. Airsports International. I worked for Teddy Mack for a while. I put about twenty Dreams together. He said I was his best worker.

JH: What gliders have you flown/owned in your career?

DN: The Cal Glider, an Electra-Floater 205, I got a Finsterwalder, HP II, all kinds of Sensors, Steve Mawhinney gave me a Sensor which I blew up in the air. It was so old that the sail ripped from the nose to the trailing edge. The string in the trailing edge held it together. I brought it in like a bomber that had just taken flack. (laughs). I had a 220 Dream. I fly a 225 Falcon now that Herb Fenner gave me after all my gliders and cars burned in the wild fire.

JH: What do you do for a living?

DN: I am retired, without a pension. (laughs) I used to do tandem hang gliding.

I drove truck, I was a shipping and receiving clerk for McMaster-Carr, fork truck driver, Fuller Brush salesman, car salesman, construction worker, carpenter, I built a barn. You name it.

JH: Was hang gliding more fun in the single surface days?

DN: That is why I am flying a single-surface. (laughs) Basically, it was.

JH: What do you do for fun or reward besides hang gliding?

DN: Surf. I have always been a surfer.

JH: What is the best thing that has ever happened to you?

DN: That I have had the freedom to make my own choices. Everything is choices and consequences. If you make the right choices, you continue to have freedom.

JH: What is the worst?

DN: I never think of bad things. I guess, when I was a kid, my parents' divorce and dysfunctional family. I don't think that affects me now.



Doug preparing to fly an early tandem flight at Torrey Pines in the 1980's.

JH: What is the most rewarding thing you have ever done?

DN: In the seventies, I was in Mexico and I was trying to figure out the meaning of Life and the right way to live Life. I decided to live in isolation for a while on a beach in Mexico. I thought I was out in the middle of nowhere. There were lots of big Pismo clams for the taking. One day an old junky school bus from a poor area pulled up on the beach. About fifty kids poured out. I was thinking I would be alone there. I decided I needed to feed those kids, so I made a big giant pot of Pismo clam chowder. I still remember that feeling.

JH: What is the wildest thing that has happened to you while flying?

DN: I flew into a water spout. I took off after Billy Floyd one stormy day. Steve Mawhinney launched right after me. As soon as I took off I saw the water looking kinda weird about a quarter mile off the North



Doug Tandem on a 229 Raven

Face. It looked bubbly and all of a sudden it went whoosh, up into a spiral and I was spinning! I said "what the *#%&!"

I was pulling in just trying to get away from the thing, cause it was trying to suck me in. I had my bar below my knees trying to penetrate down to LaJolla Shores to land. Steve was closer than I was, and it just sucked him up! Believe me, every year since, Steve tells me exactly the date and time and everything – November 9th, 1982!

I didn't think he was going to make it. He was getting sucked up into the clouds. I thought he was a goner, cause I thought I was a goner and he was closer to it.

Billy made it to the "Shores" and landed. He had figured out that this was nothing to be flying in. We finally made it to the "Shores" and landed. That was wild.

JH: What is the craziest thing you have ever witnessed in hang gliding?

DN: I saw Allen Chuculate fly into the power lines down in Mexico. To see a guy flying his trike and suddenly he's a giant fireball. It was horrible.

I saw Kyle try a loop one time while demoing an Axis 15. Both the wings blew off as he pulled up. The chute opened just as he bounced. He was alright.

I saw Monte Bell take that Klingberg Wing to the North Face and start to make his first turn back to the south. He stalled the turn and spun into the side of the cliff. He totally blew it up. There was nothing left except Monte.



Doug Newby flying against a stormy sky

I remember one time one of Jon Lindbergh's wires broke. That was in the early days. It didn't fold, but he couldn't control it. He just spiraled until he landed in a gully behind the cliff by some houses. He was alright.

Billy Floyd borrowed someone's Fledge. Bill was into doing loops, so he took it over to the North Face. About three hundred feet over he started bringing it into a dive, and the wings started waffling and it just folded. The wings folded negatively and trapped Bill inside. Pretty soon we saw an arm come out through a hole tossing a reserve. It didn't open. He pulled it back in and tossed it again. I can't remember if it opened or he bounced, but he spent time in the hospital that time.

JH: What is your philosophy of Life?

DN: Live life to the fullest, and don't look back on your life as an old man saying "should have, would have, and could have". Seek what truth is, and what life is about. Be happy. Be fulfilled. Seek more than the material wealth of dust and rust.

There are people out there on the freeways right now trying to buy their future and security. They are selling their life energy force for security that is not really there. You can see the stresses of that lifestyle and philosophy of Life. That's why I'm flyin', man. Because I have enough time and enough freedom to observe and ask the right questions. Like, what is that material security and all those responsibilities worth. Man, that isn't living. Life is too short. I really don't have time to pursue those misplaced values.



Doug Newby at Torrey Pines with his 1959 MGA Roadster and his 220 Dream. Doug restored the Roadster himself.



Doug Newby Launching at Torrey Pines



Doug's Dream 220 which was named both "white lightning" and "white cloud"



Doug Newby flying free in a Torrey Pines Sunset

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