

YOU SAY YOU WANT YOUR WIFE TO FLY?

By Joni M. Fisher

A mere six percent of the licensed pilots in America are female. As one of them, I often hear men complain, “I can’t get my wife to fly with me.” Okay, guys, let me explain why the tactics some of you have used to attract your loved one into aviation have driven her away from it and what you can do differently.

SEE HOW SAFE IT IS?

My husband asked me that at 4,000 feet after throttling back the engine. He thought that demonstrating his skill at handling a simulated emergency would instill confidence. I was not a pilot then so the maneuver felt like a real emergency that instilled terror, followed by fury. This stunt has been repeated by males all over the country. If you want your wife to fly with you then never, ever take her for a thrill ride to show her how well you handle the plane. How impressed would you be if your pilot on a commercial flight demonstrated a roll? A method that works: invite her on a short flight in gorgeous weather and give her a smooth, uneventful ride. Instead of acting like a race car driver behave like a limo driver.

I’M GOING WITH OR WITHOUT YOU.

This is another dangerous tactic. It dares the one left behind to find her own fun things to do without you. Why make the airplane an object of scorn and jealousy? Trust me when I say that bullying, nagging, and harassing women will not achieve positive long-term results. Sure, it takes time to discuss and address her concerns about flying. Perhaps her hesitation to take your offer of a four-hour flight means she has a three-hour bladder. For you flying may have been

love at first flight while she needs a longer courtship. One enterprising pilot lured his wife into a deep love of aviation with this deal—for every dollar he spent on flying he gave her a dollar.

When I met this couple during the Cayman Caravan she, adorned with stunning jewelry, gushed about how much she adored flying.

YOU SHOULD WANT TO.

Yes, yes, you enjoy flying and you expect that because you do she should, too. And when, exactly, did you take up cross-stitch to share her appreciation of it? For some couples, the ideal arrangement is for the woman to ride along. If she doesn't want to take lessons, she might enjoy reading the checklist, setting the radio and transponder codes or helping in other ways as an educated passenger. If you can convince her to take the 10-hour Pinch-Hitter's course then it would give her the chance to try out aviation without a long-term commitment. This course demystifies the purpose of all those whiz-bang toys on the panel. I took the course because my husband wanted to buy a plane. During that brief course, I discovered the fun. It can happen.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU WANT TO FLY?

What are you gonna do if your wife really does enjoy flying enough to get her license? Be honest. When you and your wife climb into the car do you ALWAYS drive? If so, then she knows in her heart that she shouldn't bother to get her license. The famous flying couple of John and Martha King operate King Schools, a flight training company, in San Diego. John explains the problem he's witnessed over and over after a woman earns her license, "the men absolutely, flat-out, totally fail to relinquish any authority or power to the woman and after all, she may as well be in the back seat because there's nothing in it for her. That is as universal as the fact that the man always rides up front on a Harley. What happens is that even when the woman is flying she's nothing more than a voice-activated autopilot and that is absolutely no fun."

I'M ONLY TRYING TO HELP.

These few words sound oh, so lame after you've switched radio frequencies on your wife without telling her and she calls Asheville approach Greensboro. Pilot-in-command (PIC) is authority women may have to enforce with rope and duct tape, if necessary. Husbands, be warned, mysterious changes in power, radio frequencies or altimeter setting pose a threat to your safety if your wife is PIC. If you wouldn't touch the controls when another man is PIC then don't do so when a woman is PIC. One time, with my mother-in-law in the back seat, I had to tell my co-pilot husband to get his hands off my knobs. It worked.

Flight Instructor John King advises couples to behave like commercial pilots when they share the cockpit. To men in the co-pilot's seat, he advises "and you don't make wild comments, as the co-pilot, in giving your opinion about this or that. All you can do is present facts. So you can say 'sink is one thousand.' That's okay. 'You're too low and darn it you're descending too fast' is not correct, because it's an opinion."

FLY LIKE ME.

It is unreasonable and unfair to expect a low-time pilot to fly like a high-time pilot. If you have a thousand hours and your wife has two hundred then it will take her longer to notice a two-degree course drift. Wait and watch. If the course drift becomes dangerous then state the facts. Hold the sarcasm. Remove any inflection or word choice that could be interpreted as disappointment or criticism. Imagine you are coaching your child to ride a two-wheeler. Allow for that awkward learning period. Be encouraging. Accept differences in style and timing.

JUST LIKE ONE OF THE GUYS.

In 500 hours of flying I've landed safely after gear malfunctions, a blown cylinder and an electrical failure. Okay, I squealed like a girl when the gear motor failed, but I used the hand

crank and landed safely. Even though women might reek of Avgas, hold umpteen ratings and fly like one of the guys, we will never be one of the guys. For example: I became one of 12,229 private pilots to earn an instrument rating in 2000. Upon return from my flight exam, the usual gathering of male pilots filled chairs in front of the terminal. After I said I had passed my instrument flight exam they congratulated me and offered to cut out my shirt. The front, of course. The dears.

So, gentlemen, since you hold 94% of the licenses, it's up to you to make aviation inviting to women. You can do it and I hope this helps.