Ag World

Glider fastens to frame on bed of pickup and connects to a 3,000-ft. tow line on reel at front of bed.

EXCITING NEW RURAL SPORT

Pickup Hang Gliding Catches On In Kansas

Ron Kenney, fertilizer manager at the Elkhart Cooperative Equity Exchange in Elkhart, Kan., doesn't need a mountain or a cliff to go hang gliding. Instead, he launches his glider from the back of a pickup traveling at 35 mph.

"It opens up flat areas to hang gliding and reduces the danger of a bad take-off," says Kenney, who along with several other hang glider pilots in his area developed a new "tow launch" system.

The glider fastens to a frame mounted at the back of the cab and connects to a 3,000-ft. tow line on a reel at the front of the bed. The driver's job is to keep the pickup at a constant speed. Once the pickup reaches 35 mph, the pilot pulls a nose release mechanism that changes the glider's angle of attack, allowing it to lift off the pickup frame and into the air. An operator on the pickup slowly lets out the line, keeping constant pressure on it by controlling hydraulic brake tension on the reel. The glider goes up and holds steady from the pull of the tow line. The pilot usually climbs to about 2,000 ft. before he releases the line and takes off.

"It's quite an experience. One second you're on the ground going 35 mph, and the next second you're 50 ft. high and climbing," says Kenney. "It's actually safer than taking off from a mountain because you leave the pickup at such a high speed that the potential problem of lack of control is virtually eliminated.

"I had been driving a long ways every weekend just to find a hill high enough to take off from. I got the idea of launching off the back of a pickup during one of those drives," says Kenney. "The beauty of the system is that the pilot in a tow launch has full control over releasing the tow line. A release mechanism on the line within arm's reach of the pilot lets him pull a pin and release the glider any time he wants to. The line is also equipped with a weak-link safety feature so the driver can't accidentally hurt the pilot by going too fast. If a certain amount of tension is exceeded, the line breaks off from the pickup. If the reel ever locks up, the weak link will break away. If the weak link breaks accidentally, the pilot still has plenty of altitude and air speed to land behind the pickup."

Once pickup reaches 35 mph, pilot pulls a nose release to lift glider off frame and into the air.

According to Kenney, it took a lot of testing to determine where the attachment points should be between the pickup and glider. The upright frame keeps the pilot from crashing into the pickup if the driver stops suddenly. It also keeps the line level.

A Texas company manufactured the pickup-mounted system for a short while before going out of business. Kenney says the idea was copied extensively.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ron Kenney, Box G, Elkhart, Kan. 67950 (ph 316 697-2577).

Novak stands next to his giant snow "sculpture" which dwarfs neighboring grain bin.

"PEOPLE WHO SEE IT CAN'T HELP BUT SMILE"

Giant 26-Ft. Snowman

Few people have ever seen a snowman as big as this 26-ft. tall giant built by Greg Novak, Gilman, Minn., who used a front-end loader, dump truck, bale elevator and snowfence to put the icy sculpture together early last December.

Novak spent about 30 hours building the snowman and used over 30 truck loads of snow. "Alberta" (named after the township Novak farms in) sports a black canvas hat, plywood eyes and mouth, a 5-gal. pail nose, burlap sack scarf, 5-gal. pail lid buttons, and 9-ft. long burlap sack arms, one of which holds a big plywood broom.

"We just did it to have fun," says Novak. "We never thought it would get this big when we started, but we had plenty of snow to work with after a couple big November snowstorms. Since we finished it, we've had calls from newspapers and radio and TV stations all over the U.S. and have had a steady stream of people driving in. It puts a smile on everyone's face when they see it."

Novak used snowfence as a "mold", building the snowman in three sections. He made the base by filling a 20-ft. dia. circle of snowfence with a front-end loader. He then put a smaller circle of fence on top of the base to make the stomach, and moved up once more to make the head. He filled both top sections using his bale elevator.

"We'd fill the fence up during the day and the snow would harden overnight," says Novak.

He made the 3-ft. high stovepipe hat out of canvas, concrete reinforcing wire and electric fence posts. The 8-ft. wide plywood mouth, as well as the eyes, nose and buttons, are held in place with steel pegs. He used 22 burlap sacks to make the scarf.

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