

Skytyping uses five or six planes. Skywriting is a kind of writing in the sky that has been around much longer and uses only one plane.



KidsPost



The Geico Skytypers can "type" a message in the sky by releasing puffs of smoke. The team typed this special message just for you!



Let's F-L-Y!



The Geico Skytypers' SNJ-2 airplanes were used in World War II to train fighter pilots.

Skytypers Spell Out Miles-Long Messages Thousands of Feet in the Air

I am not a wimp. I am rarely scared of anything, but watching the Geico Skytypers while sitting on the beach at Ocean City made me nervous. That's because after the performance, I was going to fly with the Skytypers. I wasn't afraid of losing my life, but I was afraid of losing my lunch. That would be embarrassing.

The Skytypers are a team of pilots who, when not performing stunts in air shows, are busy typing messages in the sky. To type messages, five or six planes line up next to one another while flying 10,000 feet in the air and release puffs of smoke that look like small, white clouds. The letters they make are as tall as the Empire State Building, and a message can stretch five to six miles.

Before the Skytypers' performance, pilot Tom Daly showed me the planes. The SNJ-2s, used during World War II to train fighter pilots, aren't like the commercial planes you might have flown on. There are no plush reclining seats or television screens in the headrests. There is only a thin layer of aluminum between a rider and the sky. It reminded me of a tin can with wings and two seats, but Daly tried to convince me that it wasn't as scary as it looked.

"Once you get good at it, it is like sitting in your living room," Daly said.

Yeah, except you don't have to wear a parachute when you are sitting in your living room, I thought to myself.

To get ready for my flight, I had to learn about the parachute and other safety gear. First up was the flame-retardant suit, which covered my body and would protect me if the plane caught on fire. There was even a present in a pocket—plastic grocery bags just in case I felt sick.

Then came the parachute, which fit like a snug backpack and had a handle on the chest that I could pull if I needed to use it. Finally it was time to hop in the plane, buckle up and put on a helmet that allowed me to talk to the pilot.

Once I was comfortable, it was time to ride. Two planes took off. In a game of daredevil follow the leader, the pilot of my plane did whatever twists and turns the first plane did. Flying my plane was



Reporter Amy Orndorff prepares to go up with the Geico Skytypers over Ocean City. Below, a reminder in the cockpit poses a funny question for a first-time passenger.



Ken Johansen; he has been a Navy pilot since 1991, so I knew that he knew what he was doing.

As the plane headed for takeoff, I grabbed a bar in front of me and held on tight. In moments we were in the air. The noise in the plane was so intense that I was happy to have the microphone-equipped helmet. Far below I could see tiny houses, horses as they grazed on Assateague Island and, a little beyond that, the vast Atlantic Ocean. We were between 1,000 and 2,000 feet in the air, which is much lower than a commer-

cial plane, which usually flies at about 35,000 feet.

We went about 150 miles per hour (in the air show they go between 120 and 180), and the two pilots performed a couple of tricks, including sharp turns and switching positions by flying above each other. At one point during the flight, one plane's wingtip was just 10 feet ahead of the other's.

When we landed I was a little woozy, but I was proud to show the team that my plastic bag was empty.

— Amy Orndorff

Sky-High Fun Facts

Interested in learning more about the Skytypers? Here are some fun facts about the team and its planes:

- During World War II, the planes earned nicknames including Pilot Maker, Old Growler, Window Breaker and Mosquito.

- Pilot Ken Johansen, 43, flew with the Skytypers when he was 8 years old. His father, Bob Johansen, has been a pilot with the team since 1977 and still flies with them.

- The planes can fly at a top speed of 220 miles per hour.

- Besides "KidsPost," the Skytypers have typed hearts, flags, marriage proposals and even a message at the World Series.

- The messages are typed 10,000 feet in the air. That is so high up that, from the ground, you can barely see or hear the planes.



Tom Daly prepares to fly one of the World War II-era planes, which have nicknames such as Old Growler.

TODAY'S NEWS



China Photos/Getty Images
Last year's earthquake in China damaged pandas' homes, too.

Wild Pandas' Habitat At Risk After Quake

There are only 600 or so giant pandas living in the wild in China. But new research shows that the habitat of these animals was severely harmed in the massive earthquake in China last year.

The tremor caused widespread damage in Chinese cities and killed thousands of people. But a recent analysis of the mountains in the area show that 60 percent of the habitat occupied by wild pandas was also badly damaged. Using satellite images, scientists found that nearly a quarter of the wild panda habitat, once forested and full of bamboo, had been turned into bare land.

His Lessons About Money Could Pay Off

Have you heard of Warren Buffett? He's the world's second-richest man (behind Bill Gates), and he has a thing or two to teach you about money.

Buffett will be starring in a series of short cartoons designed to offer basic financial lessons to kids. The cartoons will be online, at first through AOL.

You might want to listen to Buffett's advice, since he is known for making some of the best investment decisions in the world over many years. His nickname is "The Sage of Omaha," his home town. At a charity event, someone recently paid more than \$1 million to have lunch with him!



Businessman Warren Buffett's cartoons will offer money advice.

SPEAK OUT



BY AMANDA BIFFEN WHITE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST
The cockpit of an SNJ-2, the airplane the Geico Skytypers use for acrobatics and writing messages.

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC

Are You a Daredevil?

Would you ever do anything as daring as the reporter in this story did? Go to www.kidspost.com and tell us:

■ Would you fly in a stunt plane if you could?

A. Totally. Sounds like fun.

B. Not in a million years!

C. Not sure; can you tell me again how safe it is?

TODAY: Hot, humid; afternoon storms

HIGH 92 **LOW** 73

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT ROSS, 6 GREAT FALLS

FRAZZ

I FOUND A DOLLAR!

WIDOW: WHAT CAN YOU GET FOR A DOLLAR?

YOUR BEALOUF!

GAME!

AND IT WORKS EVEN WHEN I DON'T SPEND IT!

JEF MALLETT

SURVEY SAYS

Last week's survey asked: What's your favorite movie this summer? More than 140 readers responded:

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	30.0%
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	9.3%
Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian	14.3%
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	22.1%
Up	24.3%