

Buying a Trike – Know What to Look For

When my wife and I (Beth is “my wife” and “I” am Terri) were looking for our first trikes we were so new we didn’t even know where to start. I mean, what do you look for in a trike? There is the obvious like does it look safe, does it look well built, how much does it cost, etc. But what other questions should be asked to get at the trike that is just right for you? Below are the questions we wish we knew to ask before we bought. We hope you will find them helpful too.

1. Can the trike be assembled by one person?

Many trikes require two people to assemble or disassemble the aircraft. *AirBornes are easily assembled by one person (Beth can put her own aircraft together by herself).* If your aircraft is

difficult to assemble you will never take it anywhere – a real shame since one of the attractive features of a trike is its portability.



2. Is the wing assembled on the ground or on the control frame?

This is related to the question above. *AirBorne wings are assembled on their control frame which keeps the wing off the ground and out of harm’s way.* Furthermore, it is a piece of cake to get the wing on its control frame while it is folded up. It is a different story once the wing is assembled. A wing assembled on the ground has two disadvantages:

a. **First, it is going to get dirty, wet, and damaged.** To set the wing up you have to move the wing halves around and doing that while the wing is lying flat on the ground is an invitation to trouble.

b. **Second, picking the assembled wing up onto its control frame is a two person job.** After you get the wing assembled a wing built on the ground has to be raised on its control frame. These wings weigh over 100 lbs and are large and bulky. It takes a strong man in calm conditions to get a wing on its frame by himself without damaging it.



3. Is there any assist to lift the wing up and lock it in position? Is it a one person job?

Remember what we said about those 100+ lbs wings? Once the wing is assembled and on its control frame you still have to connect it to the trike's mast and raise the mast and wing into position above the trike. Unless the trike's design provides for some leverage or assistance you'll have to bear the full weight of the wing to lift it into position. *AirBorne trike masts are counter-balanced by the engine (Redback, Outback, and Classic) or incorporate a hydraulic assist (XT-582 and XT-912). On the XT series the hydraulic assist effectively reduces the weight of the wing to about 30lbs – a lot better than 108.*



4. When the wing is at rest is the control bar in the way? Some trikes have nose heavy wings. This doesn't affect how they fly but it means that on the ground the control bar will be in your chest all the time. Some pilots don't mind but most find this a terrible nuisance. Every time you try to adjust your straps, connect up your intercom, get into and out of your trike you are constantly fighting the control bar. *AirBorne's have balanced wings that rest at the bar neutral position. Additionally, while at rest most pilots secure the wing to the front mast to get the bar out of the way entirely until they are ready to fly. This also stabilizes the wing in light breezes.*

5. How easy is it to tune the wing? A trike wing may come with or develop a turn to the left or right. How easy is it to "tune" the turn out of the wing. Many trike wings require you to play with little knots on the trailing edge of the wings to tune the turns out. It is tedious and difficult to do accurately. *AirBorne provides easy screw based tuning adjustments at the wing tips. With a hex wrench you easily adjust the wing. Additionally, AirBorne wings have the easiest batten tensioners in the business. Most manufacturers would have you tension their battens using little strings (the same ones containing those little knots) – it is painful as the strings cut into your fingers. AirBorne battens use a unique batten tensioner that is a joy to use. You can also use them to further tune the wing by screwing them in or out (to decrease or increase wing tension). What could be easier?*



6. Is the trike pod too low to the ground? Some manufacturers build their pods very low to the ground. This is fine if you are always landing at an airport or a manicured grass strip. But if you want a trike that can land on unimproved fields then you should look for an aircraft that has been built with those strips in mind. *AirBorne builds their trikes to handle the outback. Many of their trikes are used by Australian farmers and ranchers and most of these strips are just that. In fact, the test strip behind AirBorne's factory is a rutted dirt road. This would destroy many trikes – but not AirBorne's.*

7. Is the trike independently certified? This gets to one of the “obvious” questions we asked in the introductory paragraph at the beginning. Everyone wants a safe trike but how do you know if it is really safe; especially if you are new to the sport and don’t know what to look for? One way is to look at the aircraft itself and ask yourself if it looks like it is ruggedly and expertly built. A lot of trikes look like they were built in someone’s garage out of spare parts. Do you really want to fly in one of those? *AirBorne trikes are independently certified to LSA and international standards. This means you don’t have to take their word for “how safe” it is.*



8. How long has the company been in business? Does it have a good reputation? Unless the company has been around for awhile how do you assess the quality of its product or its reputation for service? Can you get spare parts and how long does it take? Is the company one that is run as a part-time / hobby venture or is it a real airplane company? How many planes do they sell and how broad is their market? The deeper and more established a company is the greater the likelihood it will be around tomorrow. Its products will tend to hold their value better and have greater history, which is necessary to ascertain how safe they are.

What if the company goes out of business – will your SLSA aircraft become an ELSA losing thousands of dollars in re-sale value? It could unless another company picks up the “continuing airworthiness” responsibilities of the original manufacturer.

AirBorne has been in business for more than 25 years. This is all the owners of AirBorne do – they build trikes and hang gliders. Their market is international. They sell more trikes than any other manufacturer in the world. They have staying power in an industry that is not known for that quality. They couldn’t have gotten this far without building great products.

9. What about training? Do you have to find your own training? Is concentrated training available? This is often over-looked by the new buyer. It is not unusual for a new buyer to order his brand new aircraft only to find out there is no one near him to provide training. You should plan on



getting your training from the dealer you buy from. You need to find out whether or not the dealer is prepared to train you. Can he offer concentrated training or will it have to be peace meal over an extended period of time? *Precision Windsports offers its customers concentrated training. Our goal is to get you solo qualified in 5-7 days. That way you can be flying your new airplane in*

days instead of months. After all, how much joy will you get out of the airplane while it is sitting in your garage or hanger? To get more information on our training program go to

<http://www.precisionwindsports.com/training/training.html>.

10. How easy is it to check the fuel for contaminants such as water and sediment? General aviation (GA) pilots know that it is important to check the fuel for contaminants before flying. If your car engine fouls and stops you just pull over to the side of the road. It is a little more serious when your airplane's engine quits. Fortunately, trike gas tanks are not as prone to water contamination (the most common contaminant) as airplane gas tanks but even so those pesky contaminants still manage to find their way into our gas tanks periodically. *So AirBorne, like all GA aircraft manufacturers, makes checking for the presence of contaminants very easy. But for most trikes it is very difficult, which means pilots never check. This is just one example of AirBorne's attention to the little details that other manufacturers typically neglect.* When shopping for a trike ask the dealer to show you how they check their fuel for contamination. They'll probably tell you it isn't really necessary – **what do you think?**

11. How good are the manuals? Can you get a copy(ies) beforehand? If you really want to find out all there is to know about a trike before buying it read the manual. *AirBorne's manuals are probably the most thorough in the industry. And, they are available on line.* When you have finally narrowed your search for a trike down to two or three candidates ask for the manuals. You may be surprised at how much impact it will have on your final decision. For AirBorne's manuals see <http://www.airborne.com.au/pages/manuals.html>.



We hope this guide proves useful to you. If you have other questions please check out our website at www.PrecisionWindsports.com, email us at info@precisionwindsports.com, and/or give us a call at (434) 851-6804.

Good Luck ☺

Terri & Beth Sipantzi own and operate Precision Windsports, Inc. (www.PrecisionWindsports.com). Precision Windsports is a full-time AirBorne dealership, providing aircraft sales and support in conjunction with concentrated flight training. They are centrally located in Lynchburg, VA.