

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a powered paraglider?

■ Pearland's Page making film about sport that lets him soar high in the sky

By **THAYER EVANS**

CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Pearland resident Chris Page loves the view from 2,500 feet up while dangling from a parachute with a motorized propeller pushing him along.

"It's awesome," he said. "Once you get up there, it's almost like going into another dimension. You can fly like a bird. It's almost unreal."

For the past two years, he has been soaring in the skies as part of a sport called powered paragliding, also known as paramotoring.

Its origin traces back to a group of European paragliders who founded the sport in the mid-1980s, he said.

Page, 43, a computer technician and independent filmmaker, started making a documentary on powered paragliding in December. He's hoping it will premiere at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival in February in Santa Barbara, Calif.

He said there are about 50 powered paraglider pilots in Houston who meet to fly on weekends, and approximately 5,000 nationwide.

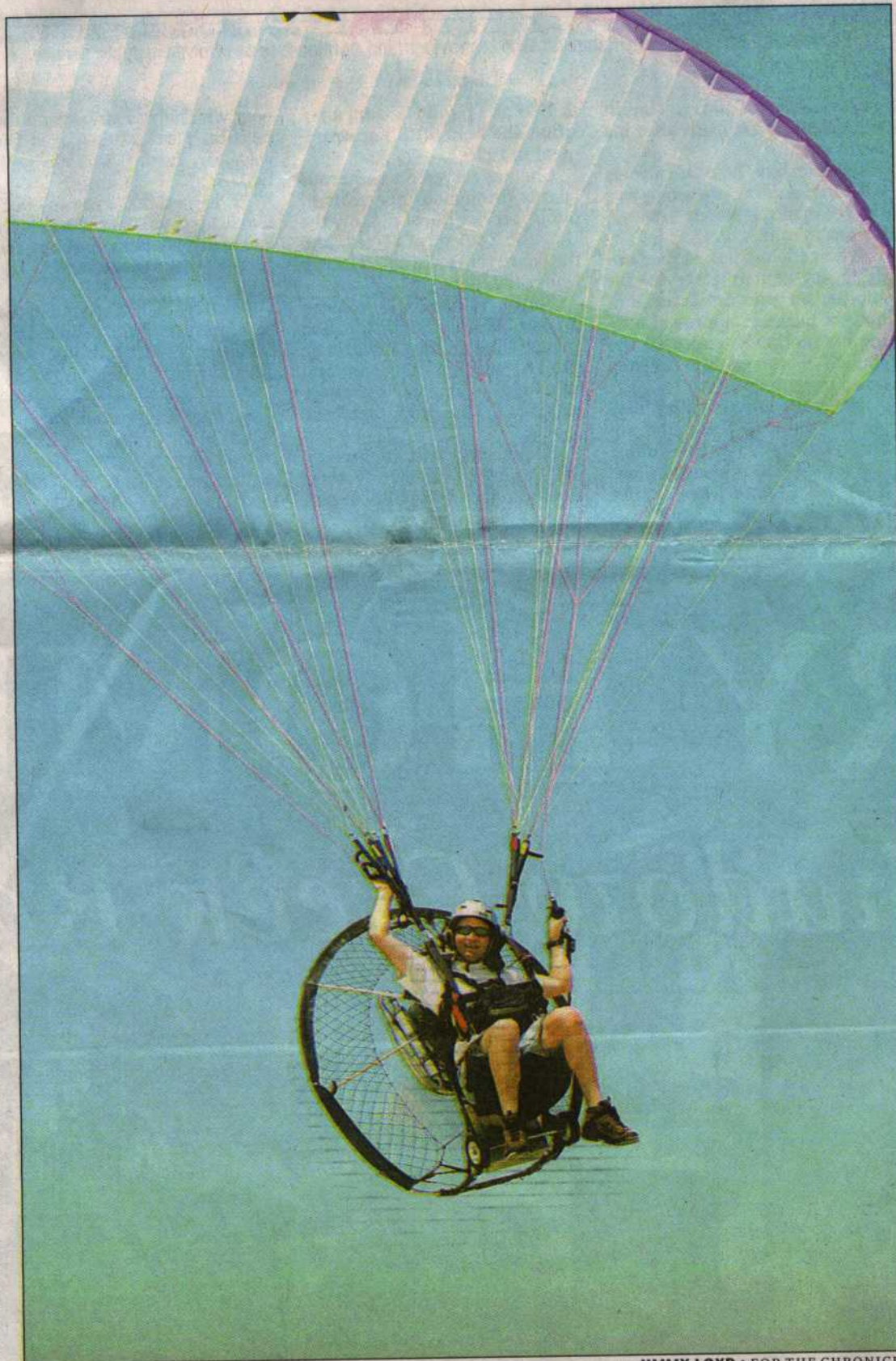
Powered paragliders wear parachutes and sit in a seat attached to an engine and propeller.

"When the power is on, we are climbing. When we're off the power, we're coming down," he said.

Powered paragliders are required to comply with the Federal Aviation Administration's regulations for ultralight aircraft, meaning pilots cannot not fly near airports or congested areas, Page said.

He said pilots, who do not need licenses, can fly up to 10,000 feet, and some have units with engines that allow

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JIMMY LOYD : FOR THE CHRONICLE

UP, UP AND AWAY: Chris Page goes for a spin on his powered paraglider on Sunday at San Luis Pass.

PARAGLIDING: No license needed

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climbing as fast as 500 feet a minute.

A new powered paraglider generally costs \$8,000, and used units can be purchased for between \$4,000 and \$6,000, Page said.

He said the parachute of a powered paraglider fits into a small bag and that its motor and cage fit into the bed of pickup truck, allowing for storage convenience and easy accessibility.

Growing up, Page said, he often flew with both of his grandfathers, who were airplane pilots. A four-year stint as a civil engineer in the Air Force during the 1980s further whetted his appetite for flight.

"I've always wanted to fly," said Page, who attended his first ever Powered Paragliding National Convention earlier this month in Polk City, Fla. "I've looked at getting my pilot's license, but you've got to commit a lot of time to that and of course to buy a Cessna is a pretty big investment."

Hooked from the start

During Page's search for a flying alternative, he found UFly2.com, a Web site dedicated to powered paragliding, owned by certified Houston instructor Andy McAvin, who taught Page how to operate a powered paraglider in a month.

"The first time I went up, I was like, 'Wow, that's for me,'" Page said.

He flies at least once a week

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—CHRIS PAGE
Pearland resident

and sometimes as many as three or four times, depending on the weather.

He said powered paraglider pilots flying inland do so within the first three hours of sunrise or the last three hours before sunset to avoid thermal conditions that cause turbulence. Under clear weather conditions, Page said pilots can fly near the coast at any time because of the constant ocean breeze.

"The way the wind is blowing really dictates where you fly," he said.

About the film

Page's documentary, which he is calling *Into the Wind*, follows Ken Reeder of Houston and Camilyn Degan of Pearland as they learn the sport.

"We follow them from day one and document their whole experience of learning how to do this, their frustrations and then triumphs soloing and beyond as new pilots," Page said.

The movie, which has its own Web site, www.Into-The-Wind.com, also will feature footage of powered paragliding in Mexico, Florida and Colorado, he said.

He said production will wrap up in July and that the documentary's final version should be done by the end of this year.

Last month, Page said, he was contacted by the organizers of the Santa Barbara festival.

"They said they really liked what I have going," he said. "We're not in for sure, but they want to see the rough cut (of the film) in November."

While Page's wife, Patty, is supportive of her husband's aerial pursuits, she said seeing him in the air the first time made her nervous.

"He was circling above us, and I thought he was too high ... But what I didn't understand then is that the higher he is, the more of a chance he has to recover from something that happens to the chute," said Patty Page, 45.

Chris Page said he has encountered an occasional problem while doing powered paragliding, but has always managed to land without incident.

"It's one of the safest ways to go flying, because you're already in a parachute," he said. "If you have a motor out or something goes wrong, you float down. It's relatively safe as long as you use common sense."

MORE DETAILS

■ **About powered paragliding:** UFly2.com

■ **About a documentary being made:** www.Into-The-Wind.com