

At Skypark, Taxis Are Dropping Out Of The Air

When you call, "Taxi!", you don't expect an airplane to swoop out of the sky.

But it can happen now.

You'll have to go to the airport, of course. That would be Skypark in Scotts Valley, not San Jose or San Francisco.

Air taxi, a form of the familiar charter service, is a new wrinkle in FAA-approved airline flying.

Like auto taxis, it might be cheaper to "take the bus" of regular airlines — but with taxis you gain the advantage of going when YOU want to, not when the airline schedule says you will. And you can go places where the airbuses don't go.

George Sharman, founder and chief pilot of the new Cruzair air taxi service at Skypark, says it opens up new ways of traveling most people don't think about.

"Let's say you want a weekend skiing at Lake Tahoe. Normally, you couldn't get all your skiing gear together and make it to an airport over the hill in time for a nice Friday evening and full weekend's skiing. Well, we can get you up there in an

hour in our twin-engined Seneca, have your transportation and hotel or motel arranged, and you happily in bed or at the casinos before you could get out of the San Francisco airport on an airline."

Round-trip cost per person would be \$45 with five people aboard the six-place executive craft. That's a total cost to all five of \$225, so if you have fewer people, divide into that.

On a share-a-ride basis, Sharman is offering commuter runs to San Francisco (\$16.50 per person for five), San Jose (\$8.50) or Oakland (\$15).

Trips to Reno and back are \$45 each in the Seneca — an hour and five minutes from Skypark — or to Las Vegas for \$102.

Cruzair has a second aircraft, a four-seater Beechcraft Bonanza, which Sharman calls "the finest single-engine aircraft built, the Cadillac of the fleet." This has a slightly higher per-person cost, but can take smaller groups of three people instead of five.

For business executives or government officials, round-



Sharman, left, pilot, and Robert Shepherd, maintenance manager.

trip hops to Sacramento from Skypark cost \$37.50 per person for five in the Seneca, or \$1 less person for three people in the Bonanza—one of the few cases where the single-engine plane is less expensive for fewer people.

Most of the rates are higher than those offered by airlines to the bigger cities, so how does Cruzair expect travelers to "call the taxi?"

"Simple," said Sharman. "It's a two-hour trip to SF International by car, plus a 45-minute check in time, waits in line at the metal detectors, and then another wait to pick up your baggage at the other end. And there's the parking problem.

"That's a three-hour saving in time. With us, the only wait is to get the bags aboard and stowed away, and the engine warmed up. Skypark is about five minutes drive from Santa Cruz, with no parking fee."

Not only that, but if your destination is, say, Visalia, you just about have to drive. The airlines are slowly dropping air service to the smaller airports

because the FAA is planning to cut flying subsidies.

The idea is that air taxis will fill in the gap. With executive-type aircraft, they can get in and out of almost all the small local airports — and virtually every small city has a private field if not a municipal one.

Cargo service is also an air taxi advantage. "I've flown many a special part for companies who were mighty glad to see us because their production was waiting for that part," Sharman grins.

And there is the more sober need for air ambulance flights, or funeral arrangements.

There is one disadvantage to flying from Skypark, Sharman admits. The airport now has no night lights (though the city of Santa Cruz plans to add them in an airport improvement program). That means night flights must be taken out of Watsonville, 12 miles away. "It's still 20 minutes shorter than driving to San Jose," Sharman said.

Sharman has been flying for 20 years (his father was an executive pilot). He has been "flying for hire" the last five years, with 3,200 hours flight time and a commercial pilot's multi-engine rating from the FAA's Civil Aeronautics Board.

Like the airlines, air taxi charters must meet strict federal regulations for safety and insurance. It took him eight months to gain the necessary check-outs and approvals from the FAA, CAB, the city of Santa Cruz, and to work out an arrangement with Skypark manager Jim Dahm.

Cruzair's two aircraft are

equipped for day and night use, with radar transponders and instrument flight gear.

Why choose Santa Cruz for an air taxi? "It's the last really beautiful place on the coast large enough to need airline service and not have it. Once people understand the advantage of air taxi service, I think we'll do just fine."

The telephone number of Cruzair is 336-5730 or 335-5230.

CHRONICLE
1/3 SCOTT VALLEY
1/3

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
December 3, 1978

SCOTT'S VALLEY