



Entrepreneur brings captive balloon flights to the urban masses

By Bill Armstrong

Call it son of Hi-Flyer. Call it a successful start. Call it AeroBalloon.

Having made a spectacularly successful debut in Boston, entrepreneur Doug Hase is launching a vision of bringing ballooning to the masses by installing a tethered helium balloon amusement ride in 60 tourist and urban venues across the United States.

Drawing inspiration (and cooperation) from Per Linstrand's Hi-Flyer operation, and from British engineer John Ackroyd, Hase has blended patented engineering, a Cameron basket, a scaled-down Hi-Flyer and a knack for permitting into a new business that exceeded his ambitious expectations this summer.

Raising a tethered helium balloon 300 feet over the Boston Common, he attracted a media partner (part of his formula) and the unique AeroBalloon drew more than 4,017 riders at \$12 per person during the City of Boston's 350th anniversary celebrations.

Building on that success, Hase will open three AeroBalloon venues this fall – in Miami (near the Metro Zoo), Orlando (near Race Rock on the I-drive) and Atlanta (near the Underground).

It's an idea that harks back to the captive balloon rides of the early 1800s. Hase believes the time is right for his company's pricing, size and unique technology to generate a successful business.



"We'd like to have one AeroBalloon in every city and tourist destination nationwide, in 60 locations nationwide, within next few years," Hase told Balloon Life.

If the beginning in Boston is any indication, things are looking up.

"The Boston season, which began on Aug 18 and ran for five weeks — was spectacular, and we will do it again next year. We had phenomenal



The helium-filled captive AeroBalloon carrying five passengers at a time made its debut in Boston this summer. Photos courtesy AeroBalloon

weather. Of the first 17 days we flew 16, twice each day."

Hase said there were people in line for every flight. Five passengers at a time ride up to the end of a 350-foot cable for a 15-minute ride in a modified Cameron hot air balloon basket. Weather permitting, the business operates from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 8:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. daily.

In contrast to the HiFlyer balloon, AeroBalloon is notable smaller and more portable.

"Hi-Flyer was more like a bus. We are more like a Porsche," he said. "We have one-tenth of the operating costs."

Hase, 37, who was raised in Colorado, said he has "been exposed to every outdoor recreation and adventure you can think of." In college he started Adrenaline Adventures, bungee jumping off bridges (that was illegal) and later from hot air balloons. That business, based in Jackson Hole, WY, and later in Boulder CO, was liquidated when federal and state regulations made it impossible to be profitable, he said.

Hase saw his first Hi-Flyer in Rome in 2002 and began planning for a scaled-down version that he could deploy less expensively and more flexibly.

He's offering AeroBalloon franchises for between \$180,000 and \$250,000, and will retain a percentage of the ride revenue.