

Soaring

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The "Hangover" from Gliding Days of 1929 and 1930 . . .

IN these days of higher development in gliding and soaring flight, when motorless planes are making altitudes and distances which threaten the supremacy of the smaller commercial airplanes (altitudes exceeding 14,000 feet and distances of more than 300 miles) we observe that there are many aviation enthusiasts who, although they keep pace with all power plane development, obviously know nothing of the recent progress of soaring.

MANY prospective glider pilots still regard the airplane pilot as the aeronautical encyclopedia, from whom all information pertaining to aeronautics may be had for the asking. In 1929 and 1930, the airplane pilot was the hero of the hour. He had been publicized, romanticized and idolized. Youngsters looked upon him as a super-man, who could conquer the air in anything with wings. Unfortunately, the widespread adulation turned many a neatly helmeted head until its owner accepted as gospel truth the popular conception of an airplane pilot's abilities.

ON looking through available statistics on glider accidents, it is surprising to find that more than fifty percent of the gliders built in the U. S. during 1929 and 1930 were smashed up when in the hands of these competent airplane pilots. Perhaps more amazing is the fact that the greater percentage of these glider accidents happened to airplane pilots who held the highest classification granted by our Bureau of Air Commerce. On what basis can we criticize the man who has had more than 1,000 hours in the air, and who has passed all written and physical examinations required for a transport pilot's license, when he crashes in so simple a device as a glider?

CERTAINLY we can have no quarrel with this man's qualifications as a pilot of a motored ship, but we can and do take issue with him on his attitude towards the glider—to him an unknown quantity. All of his training and experience has been based on the principle of a plane propelled through the air by a motor. Why should he assume that his province includes a complete knowledge of the widely divergent principles of a plane propelled solely by air currents and gravity? Seldom has there been an instance when an aviator of this class has come forward and admitted: "This is a new one on me". No, far more often do we hear that "something was wrong with the glider—the ailerons were too sluggish, the flippers were too sensitive, or the stalling characteristics were tricky". It is unfortunate that these same pilots are in a key position to do the most damage to any hopes of glider furtherance. They are the persons to whom would-be glider club members would most naturally go for advice and information.

IN this country, for all practical purposes, the differences between a powered plane and a sailplane still remain unrecognized by the general air-minded public. Clearly, there are differences, in theory and practical operation, as well as preliminary knowledge, commonly known as ground instruction. The motor boat operator and the sailboat skipper have an entirely different course of training. Our motor boat pilot may be an engineering wizard, and demon navigator, but all his knowledge of his own medium would come to naught were he sent out to sea in a tipsy little sail boat. Conversely, any real old salt of the finest sailing vessel would have to learn the rudiments of an engine before he could bring to harbor one of our saucy speed boats. Glider pilots do not demand nor expect an airplane pilot's license because they have "flown" successfully. Why then should airplane pilots assume that their experience in a powered craft entitles them to a place in the soaring world?

AT the present time, our Government, and well informed airmen everywhere, are beginning to penetrate the haze which has surrounded motorless flying since those dark days of 1929. It will take persistent public education to dispel it completely. When the man on the ground realizes that there are two definite types of planes, those with motors and those without motors, just as there are two large classes of boats, those with motors and those with sails, we can expect soaring to receive recognition in the form of government supervision with definite requirements both for ship and pilot. At that time, soaring will have arrived. Today, it is well on its way.