

A SURVEY OF BRITISH GLIDING

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IN JUNE, 1930, when gliding had been developed to a high degree as a sport in Germany, Robert Kronfeld, then an Austrian, visited this country and soared 50 miles along the South Downs. There had previously been practically no gliding in Britain,* and the idea of sustained flight produced solely by the skill of the pilot captured people's imagination and appealed to them particularly as a sport.

Unfortunately, the demand for gliding clubs and the enthusiasm aroused was greater than the experience, money and supply of gliders then available. Inevitably, the few gliders got broken through lack of experience; home repairs were found to be beyond the ability of the members; money ran out; and many clubs collapsed.

The majority of the clubs which had started in this boom of the early 1930s ended in this manner, but a few, notably the London Club, fought their way through the difficulties, put their finances on a sound basis, acquired sufficient gliders, and, with seemingly endless labour, carried on.

Four years later the efforts of these clubs were rewarded in two ways. First, by the production of a first-class sailplane pilot who had been trained at Dunstable. His name was Eric Collins, and he took every opportunity to fly that came his way. He became the first British Silver C holder, obtaining International Certificate No. 26, and in 1934 broke the British Distance Record by flying 98 miles on a German high-performance sailplane. This flight and the others it inspired opened up the market for high-performance machines in this country, and the Hjordis, which subsequently beat Collin's record, was designed by Sqdn. Ldr. (now Group Capt.) G. M. Buxton to fill the gap.

*At an earlier International Gliding Meeting organized by the *Daily Mail* at Itford Hill, near Lewes, Sussex, in 1922, a French pilot, Maneyrol, soared for 300 minutes. From this affair grew the subsequent light aeroplane competitions.—Ed.

An Eon Olympia over a wintery England. Two of these ships are now in the United States and will be flown at Wichita Falls. Chet Decker will fly one of them competitively.



Secondly, the British Gliding Association was granted an annual subsidy of £5,000 (\$20,000) to further the sport of gliding in Britain, as it was realized that here was an excellent method of obtaining air experience relatively cheaply with a high safety factor. The production of British gliders for export was also considered worth while.

This £5,000 was paid to the B.G.A. for distribution to the clubs, and was allocated, on a basis of certificates gained, towards the purchase of basic flying equipment, up to 70 per cent. being paid for from subsidy. The clubs, which were never wealthy, owing to the low prices they charged, worked every penny of the subsidy to its limit, and got and gave amazingly high value for it. Typical costs to the public during these years were, at major clubs:—Entrance fee, £1 1s** (\$4.25) annual subscription, £3 3s. (\$12.75); flying rates, 3s. per day for primary training, 1s. 6d. each for circuits, and 6s. per hour for soaring. A fortnight's course, including membership, food and board, cost approximately £12 12s. (\$51.)

By attending a course, or coming regularly to the club, a pilot could reach the stage where he could expect to stay in the air, under suitable conditions, for considerable periods, in, roughly, 14-40 flying days, or for a total flying and subscription cost of £9 to £12. With further experience and improved machines, this time was cut down and the total price consequently reduced.

Subsidy allowed the standard of flying to be raised, by its assistance to the basic training side of the clubs, as income from subscriptions, etc., could be used more for the purchase of machines of better performance, permitting members to continue their training towards the skilled Silver C stage, on club machines. This proved a great stimulus, as advanced soaring (to which the Silver C qualifying flights are merely the gateway) is, after all, the real attraction of gliding. Until a pilot has achieved his first real soaring flight, he cannot have fully discovered this, for no amount of description is adequate.

Gliding and soaring call for and develop those qualities which have been, in the past, the epitome of English youth, and which will be necessary for the full recovery of this country. Team work and unselfishness are essential, as no pilot can get into the air without assistance from others; but once the flight has started the pilot is on his own, and its success depends upon his skill, the care and correctness of his plan of action, his physical endurance and ability to fly accurately for perhaps six or seven hours at a stretch, and, above all, his desire and determination to make a success of what he is doing. For the youth in his teens, who will have to fit in with the World in the state it is in to-day, such experience will be beyond price.

**£1 equals \$4.00. 1s equals \$0.25.