

Perhaps at this point it might be of interest to record the war-time activities of the 50 men and women, eligible for call-up, who had obtained their Silver C International Soaring Certificate before September, 1939, this country then holding the third highest number of Silver Cs in the World. At least 80 per cent. were in the Services, were test pilots, or were engaged on radar and other scientific research work. An additional 8 per cent. were regular A.T.C. instructors; 16 per cent. were killed in action or on active service, and between them they won one C.B.E., four D.S.O.s, one O.B.E., one D.S.C., one M.C., six D.F.Cs. and two A.F.C.s. Of these, at least 62 per cent. originally learned to fly on club gliders.

The Subsidy in Retrospect

One result of the granting of the pre-war subsidy was that it allowed many of the clubs to hold residential courses throughout the Summer, and thus take full and economical use of the increased equipment. The courses were usually of a fortnight's duration, and they made it possible for many people to learn to fly who normally lived too far from a gliding club. Such people were often responsible for the subsequent formation of a club in their own locality. Others who came to these courses were members of the peace-time Services, who could not get any, or enough, flying in their own branch.

These courses were very successful, and the combination of flying and outdoor activity, in attractive countryside, were for many a most worth-while leave or holiday.

In 1939, the clubs were asked, through the B.G.A., if they could extend such courses to include some for the training of Air Defence Cadets, the founder members of the A.T.C. The clubs accepted, and it was agreed to offer £7 per head for a total of 700 boys on 14-day courses, to be divided among the most suitable clubs. Here was what looked like the beginning of flying training for large numbers of boys who could not otherwise afford to fly.

The aim was to get the boys to the stage where they could do solo circuits of the airfield ("B" Certificate) for this amount, which is almost twice as far as the A.T.C. cadet is allowed to go under the present Air Ministry scheme, which costs considerably more per head. Unfortunately, the War started after a few months, before many of the boys had started flying, and the scheme was stopped, like nearly everything else, in the general excitement. Even so, 207 certificates were gained.

The Cost of Contest Flying

Each year up to 1939, National Gliding Contests were held at one of the club sites, and at these meetings the latest British sailplanes were flown against imported machines. The nine days' regular flying which the amateur competitors were able to put in resulted in an improvement in handling and flying which only regular practice could bring about, and year by year the numbers of competitors increased and the general standard of flying improved until the leading pilots in this country could practically hold their own with their heavily subsidized continental counterparts.

The total numbers entering the competitions were, however, not as high as the number of pilots qualified and keen to enter, due to the cost of contest flying, and the fact that there was no subsidy to assist the advanced or scientific aspect.



Vertical and going on over. The Eon Olympia photographed in the best tradition of British aerial photography which is never content to let a ship fly just straight and level.

This was a pity, as high-performance soaring was, and is still so much in its infancy, that every flight was, in fact, an exploration, and a step forward. This progressive attitude was one of the most vital contributions to the sport and added considerably to existing information on meteorological and aerodynamic matters.

During the Summers of 1937 to 1939 high-performance soaring was going forward so rapidly, even in the hands of the few enthusiasts who could afford the time necessary, that one became out of date with what had been achieved, even in the course of a week; for instance, in one month in 1938, the British Distance Record was broken five times. These British records were still far short of the World records, made with the aid of State subsidies, and the easier soaring weather which prevails on the Continent, or on any large land mass in the temperate zones.

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