Power for Soaring

The soaring fraternity has labored unceasingly to bring soaring to a position of national importance in the realm of sport. That the objective has not yet been attained is obvious.

It certainly has not been due to lack of effort but rather to the operational methods requisite for soaring flight using conventional glider equipment, and to some extent the promotional approach to the American sportsmen. There are, of course, many solutions to these problems. One of these is the powered sailplane.

The powered sailplane has long been neglected as a potential vehicle for the promotion of soaring flight. Preoccupation with design refinement of present sailplanes, lack of suitable power-plants and scarcity of funds have undoubtedly restricted the development of such powered sailplanes. Today soaring needs such a craft if it is to reach its goal.

Briefly, here is why. First, the approach to the American sportsman must emphasize the enjoyment that soaring has to offer rather than the specialized skill it requires. The average American sportsman is far more content to enjoy his sport and would much prefer to leave the stiff competition to the professionals and the more adept. The popularity of skiing, boating and such bears out this statement. That participation in popular sports be convenient is also a must. The powered sailplane fills this requirement easily.

Second, the present need for special airports and soaring sites for gliding and soaring flight must be eliminated except for special competitive flying. The wide utilization of existing airports is imperative. Unfortunately many airport operators do not approve of glider activity as a permanent adjunct. Recent operations with powered sailplanes, however, have encountered no serious objection from airport managers.

Third, the problem of student instruction cannot be overlooked in any realistic approach to the development of soaring. The present operational methods are too slow, cause too much delay for rapid instruction and are contingent upon good soaring weather for low cost operation.

The powered sailplane can effectively operate with no time lost for towing, lack of soaring weather and the like. Landing techniques and instruction methods are comparable to conventional airplane practices. Weak thermal conditions that cannot sustain flight in conventional gliders can be utilized to demonstrate soaring techniques in a powered sailplane.

Fourth, the operational cost both for school instruction and pleasure flying can be kept to a minimum with a powered sailplane. This is predicated on the supposition that new lower-cost designs will be forthcoming.

The development of powered sailplanes has been slow. Only a very few experimental craft have been built and all were modified from existing equipment. Foreign development has been little better. However, we have recently produced two craft designed specifically as powered sailplanes, namely the Nelson "Dragonfly" and the "Humming Bird." The former is the first craft to be type certificated as a powered glider by the CAA.

These ships, it is realized, are not the ultimate in such designs but are felt to be a step in the right direction. Let's see more of them developed.

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