

by FREDERICK MATTESON

EUROPEAN REPORT

This year I made a tour of Europe — a trip I had been looking forward to for many years. It was mainly a tour by bicycle visiting sights, staying at hostels and meeting people on the other side of the Atlantic. In the course of this tour I visited as many soaring sites, clubs, and factories as was convenient. Visiting these places that had been just names in the literature was very interesting. The term "gliding fraternity" also took on a broader meaning because in spite of some language barriers I was treated as a brother. To those who made my visits so pleasant I would like to express my thanks.

As I flew to London, my first visit was to famous Dunstable. By coincidence, on the bus going out to the site, I met Klaus Dierolf who was one of the crew for the German team in Spain and was going to the site for the first time. When we walked down the 250 foot high chalk hill I was surprised that so many good flights could be made from such a small slope. We were shown the field and facilities by Mr. Dudley Hiscox. Although there was little or no lift in the air, the airport was very active. We were able to fly the Slingsby T 21-b on a winch launch. This machine is ideal as a trainer and possesses remarkable performance in view of its awkward appearance. Imagine my surprise, after landing on the rolling field, to look up and see a former fellow member of the Ames Coaring Club, Mel Stickney. Mel was visiting the field from Germany prior to returning to California.

Mr. Fred Slingsby had invited me to see his factory and the local soaring site at Sutton Bank. So I called on him and we saw the plant first. No other aircraft plant in the world could be more beautifully situated. Away from town in the peaceful Yorkshire countryside is this neat plant — one not dedicated to "death and dividends" as Philip Wills puts it. In it were various examples of his designs in construction including the new Skylark. This design is very similar to one I had been working on and I was naturally favorably impressed with it. Using a laminar-flow airfoil and a three-piece high-aspect-ratio wing, he has built high performance into a small low-cost sailplane. He is experimenting with plastics and other materials to bring the cost of construction down.

That evening Mr. and Mrs. Slingsby took me to dinner at Thirsk.

With us were Bob Swinn and Sue Parke. Bob had recently returned from Egypt where he had been instructing for one of the world's wealthiest glider clubs. His accounts of experiences were most interesting.

I spent most of the following day at Sutton Bank, home of the Yorkshire Gliding Club. Compared to American fields the English fields are fancy. Both at Dunstable and Sutton Bank the Clubs had very adequate facilities including a bar in the clubhouse. Because of the high cost of petrol winch tows are used. Over land once inhabited by bronze age people we laid out a new winch take-off site. The various members helped and it didn't take long to do the job. Very few ships are individually owned in England and competitions are often between the different clubs. The club spirit is very refreshing.

The hangar at Sutton Bank almost looks like a collection of Mr. Slingsby's products. The English soaring movement owes much to this gentleman. After enjoying a lunch of Mrs. Slingsby's sandwiches and ice cream I bid them goodbye, feeling also much indebted to them for their hospitality.

It was while bathing in Lake Vänern late one evening that I looked up and saw my first Swedish soaring. The Karlstad group were flying a T 21b off a winch. I went to the field and introduced myself. The pilots there answered my "Do you speak English?" unanimously in the very best English. They showed me a fine hangar filled with German, English, and Swedish types of sailplanes and a comfortable club house. Because of the long days these fellows were still flying about 9:30 when I left. My experience of looking up and seeing gliders was quite common in Sweden. My two weeks there were graced with the type of soaring weather one dreams of with beautiful tall cumulus clouds popping all day. While cycling near Eskilstuna I happened to see a Weihe under a cloud, high above the forests — what a good time he was having going from cloud to cloud! Also at Jönköping I was surprised while at the train station to see gliders right over the town. And it was a T 21b again that pointed the way to Älle-

berg, the national soaring school. I met Leonard Stahlfors, the chief instructor, who showed me around. I didn't expect to find a Schweizer 1-19 and 2-22 there. They like them very much. I had lunch in the dining room overlooking the surrounding countryside. I shall never forget drinking milk there in huge vessels that looked like glazed flower pots. It is little wonder that those well-tanned students looked so healthy. The school uses modern techniques — two-place gliders and aero tows. I watched a group of students that afternoon soaring about in Olympias. It was easy to see why this nation's pilots have a good record in international meets.

John Graves of the SCSA has been living in Wiesbaden and invited me to visit some German activities with him in his new Volkswagen. A former German soaring pilot, Ulrich Christiansen, now living in California, had arranged an invitation for me from the Deutscher Aero Club and it was here that John and I went first. We met Mr. Dabrock and his secretary. They invited us to have dinner with them at the Frankfurt airport where we would meet Hanna Reitsch. I had read of her even when I was in grammar school and my speaking with her did seem an opportunity too good to be true. I could easily understand why this charming lady was so respected and loved in her homeland. At that time she had just been given a Kranich III and was about to enter the national meet at Oerlinghausen.

That evening John and I rode to Gmünd and visited the Hornberg site the next morning. It was here that I saw my first Mü 13-E's and Spatz gliders — types common now in Germany. Mr. Bähr showed us the new sleeping rooms, classroom, hangar and completely equipped shops for training and repair. I believe the facilities at this pre-war site were destroyed in the last days of the war and only the restaurant and swimming pool appeared to be of pre-war vintage. However now I think it is the best equipped school I have seen. Such progress is characteristic in Germany. As I later pedaled about I would see gliding activity

(Continued on Page 12)