

THE "YACHT-CLUB" APPROACH

by RICHARD J. COMEY

While my soaring activities during the last year were very limited, I have had the opportunity to do a fair amount of objective thinking on a number of the problems confronting the soaring movement.

This past summer I happened to spend some time at the seashore and had a firsthand chance to see all the moneyed people invest in sail boats etc. as compared to what is currently being invested in sailplanes. A good sail boat costs as much or more than a good sailplane and there are thousands of people who have seen fit to invest in the former.

It is interesting to reflect on the differences and similarities of the two sports. Without going into the oft repeated details there are many reasons why sailing is more popular. Basically sailing thrives on the congenial yacht club atmosphere, the competitive urge to harness the elements of nature, the beauty of the surroundings in which the sport takes place.

For those who would sail if they lived or vacationed on the seashore or a large lake, but who happen to live too far inland, soaring would seem to be the best substitute and it offers the same basic attractions. A very large portion of our population lives where there is no sailing — and where soaring is possible.

The sailing activity I saw going forward in full bloom this summer is just as expensive and just as much work as soaring. It is easier to put a sailplane away for the winter than a boat. Sailplanes do not have to be painted every year. There is a lot of fall-der-all with sails, jibs, rigging, tenders and moorings before and after a typical trip in a sail boat.

In short there are at least ten to twenty times as many people in the U.S. who have the basic desires, the money and/or the willingness to do the work involved in soaring than are currently engaged in our sport. The primary problem is getting these people into soaring and under favorable circumstances.

Everything that is done to make sailplanes less expensive, easier to launch, safer and more congenial, will help a lot. The powered sailplane and the all-purpose all metal two-place sailplane, are the two things that might advance the sport the most from a technological point of view. Widespread construction and use of a one-design-class sailplane such as the fleet new Schweizer "1-26" will also be of real assistance.

"With regard to your article on the 'Yacht Club Approach' I generally agree that this certainly is the thing that is lacking with soaring today. Proof of this is that the few clubs that have approached this type of operation have grown steadily. It is certainly the thing that is lacking here at Elmira . . . we are hopeful of selling the idea to the county officials in the next year or two so we can get something of this nature going at Harris Hill.

I have always felt that gliding is a lot like skiing. Skiing did not amount to much until the ski tow and the weekend resort came into being. We think the same thing is true with soaring. When we get cheaper launchings and put operations on a 'yacht Club' basis, I think gliding and soaring will really come into its own."

*Paul A. Schweizer,
Secretary, SSA.*

However, until the day of the popularly-priced powered sailplane arrives, the "yacht club approach" seems to hold the most promise for expanding soaring on a solid basis. When a soaring activity is developed to the point where it provides the services and the congenial atmosphere of a small yacht club it will attract and hold those in the community with the latent interest

and the necessary money to perpetuate the activity.

Briefly what is needed is an adequate soaring site, hangar, administrative building suitable for holding dances and other social gatherings, a "pro" to teach the young, help those who need help, serve as tow pilot, etc., suitable launching facilities, usually including one or more tow planes, diverse facilities such as swimming pool, playground, snack bar, meteorological instruments, darkroom, repair facilities and model plane workshop.

The whole thing would be a family affair. Children would serve as junior crew men and start flying single-place utilities or "2-22's" at the age of fourteen. Wives and husbands could both soar. Emphasis would be placed on social activities, weekly club competitions and the annual club invitation meet. Ships would be individually owned with the exception of possibly one, two or three club gliders.

There would be 50 to 100 members each putting up \$500 to \$2000 at the start and paying annual dues of \$50 to \$100 plus launching and service fees and possibly hangar rent.

There would have to be a certain amount of promotion at the start. \$200 to \$400 worth of newspaper advertising should bring the club to the attention of practically everyone living in the area and attract a good turnout for soaring movies, open days at the field, etc. This coupled with personal contact work, adequate signs around the area and free publicity gained by cooperation with newspapers, radio and television stations — articles, photos, interviews, films, etc. — should do the job.

The idea is not merely to tap the "lunatic" fringe and have just bare survival facilities that these people will put up with, but establish a really going operation that will attract the real citizens and sportsman of the area who want something a little more sporting than chasing a golf ball.

A number of our clubs partially approach this ideal. The AGCSC, SCSA, EASC, PGC, NCSA, PNSA, Dallas, Rochester, Wurtsboro and Dayton groups measure up in varying degrees, but I think it is safe to say not one has yet flowered to the extent that it attracts and holds as many members as it could if it had more complete facilities. With an extra surge a number of these groups could attain the status of well-rounded solid organizations capable of attracting greater numbers of sportsmen with the where-with-all to own good sailplanes and actively participate throughout the year.

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