

# EUROPEAN VENTURE

by

BETSY WOODWARD

My first encounter with British gliding came last March; the day after I stepped off the boat. The place: Lasham, site of the Surrey, Imperial College, and Army Gliding Clubs. The reason: I was to help out with the instructing for several weeks until the arrival of Derek Piggott who was to be their permanent C.F.I. It was cold. It was damp. And I began to think of the California sunshine I had recently left. But within a few moments I was struck by a sight I had never seen in this country. Dozens of members who had waited all afternoon for a five-minute flight; another dozen helping to walk the sailplanes back to the starting line; someone assigned to signaling, dispatching, etc. It's seen in this country during a contest but at Lasham it happens every week-end and regardless of whether soaring is possible.

In England many of the larger clubs run ab initio courses for non-members during the spring, summer and autumn months. The course usually lasts two weeks and the students live on the site. For this first course of the year at Lasham Ann Welch (formerly Ann Douglas) and I took care of the instructing, along with another instructor or two who might help out for the day. Since the above three named clubs had recently pooled their equipment, it was, for all practical purposes a single club. However for this first course they had evidently signed up students individually and as a result there was a turnout of about thirty when there should have been ten. This led to a bit of confusion and made a long day if all were to get several flights. Since I lived on the site in a trailer I told them that I was ready to fly any time they were. When the weather was satisfactory (I learned that this term has a different meaning in England) they would wake me up at 6 a.m., get the ships (machines in U.K.) out of the hangar and then I would arrive and give them a daily inspec-

tion. Flying would keep up all day, sometime with meals staggered so the operation could continue, and ended about 8 o'clock, a half hour after sun down.

Instruction was carried out in T-21's, a side by side open cockpit trainer built by Slingsby. I found it

usually complete his B or C certificate. Launches were made by two winches and one auto, and heights would be 800-1000 feet. Since the field is large (a surplus airfield) these two types of launches could be carried out almost simultaneously. The auto would be situated on the run-

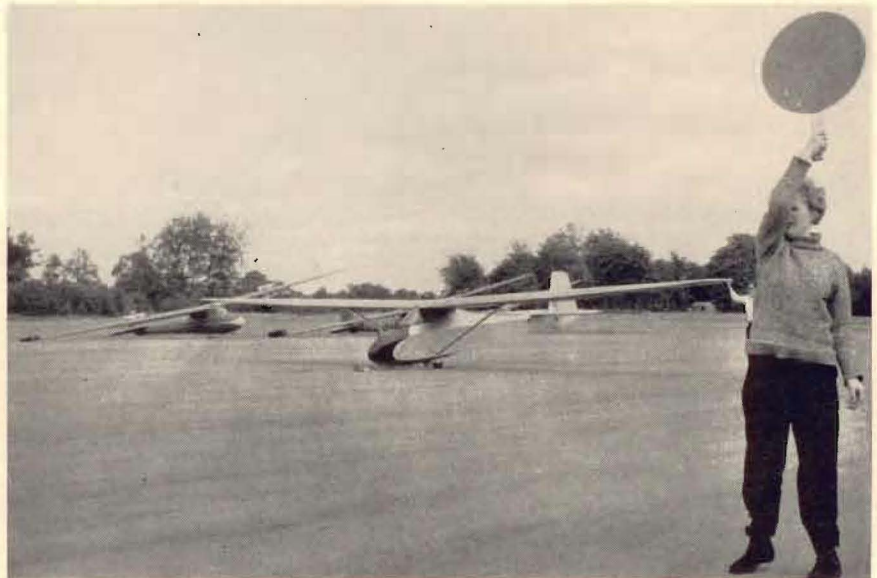


Photo: Betsy Woodward

Hilary Blanchard signaling to start the Prefect. The Eon Olympia is on the left. Miss Blanchard is now in Washington, D. C.

an excellent machine for this purpose; the flying characteristics being similar to the Schweizer 2-22. Initial solo would be made in the single-seat Grunau or Slingsby Prefect (a practice I felt dubious about at first but it has worked out very satisfactorily) and frequent check rides would be given in the T-21. After considerable experience in the Grunau and Prefect the student would advance to the Olympia and from there to the Weihe. This procedure has now been changed; the initial solo flights are made in the T-21 with ballast. After a dozen or so flights, he will proceed directly to the Olympia.

During a two weeks course the ab initio would generally solo at the end of about 30 or 40 flights and would

way; the winches about a hundred yards to one side on the grass. The club owns a Tiger towplane but this would usually only be used on week-ends by the more advanced pilots who wanted to make a cross-country.

Like most of the clubs, Lasham has facilities for sleeping and meals, and has a bar. As a result, there is considerably more "club life" than can be generally found in this country. There is no government subsidy for private clubs in England though they benefit indirectly from the sponsored A.T.C. (Air Training Corps) since this program helps to keep the manufacturers in business and increases the national interest in gliding. As I see it, the private clubs would not be in

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