

EDITORIAL

What is wrong with soaring in the U. S.?

I would like to make a few observations based on 26 years participation. Soaring in high performance aircraft was first introduced to the U. S. in 1929 when a German team and their sailplanes were brought to this country to soar on the Cape Cod sand dunes. This created a brief flurry of interest on which several U. S. manufacturers capitalized to produce primary gliders. Unfortunately, many enthusiastic persons who purchased these gliders were not pilots but thought they could learn to fly simply by strapping themselves in the seat, stretching an elastic cord and being catapulted into the air. Others attempted launchings by the use of an automobile tow or even developed winches for this purpose.

It is easy to understand how these tyros wrecked the gliders, frequently on their first flight, and if severe injury or death was not a result of the crash, certainly there was no further interest in trying to become a glider pilot. The spark died quickly. More intelligent groups sought the assistance of pilots from their local airports. Unfortunately, the attitude of these pilots was that the glider was a simple engineless aircraft and they treated it as a toy. After several prominent power pilots and many others less prominent, were either seriously or fatally injured, it was the general feeling that gliders were dangerous. In reflecting on this, it is easy to see it was not the glider which was dangerous, it was the fact that the persons operating the gliders failed to recognize that they were still aircraft, and as such, should be treated with respect.

A small group of enthusiasts continued throughout the years, developing soaring to a fine art and a superb sport, and we are about to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of National Soaring Competitions in the U. S. Each year these competitions have received considerable national publicity and in recent years, our pilots have brought nine world's records to this country. Why then are there so relatively few participating in soaring?

In previous editorials I have mentioned the cost and scarcity of gliders and fields from which to operate as contributing factors. These are of significant importance when we consider the means available to most young men and women at the age they are looking for an outlet for their ener-



Staff Photo

Floyd J. Sweet, President
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gies. If they had a spark of interest in flying, economics soon quenched it. Therefore, if we wish to have an air-minded citizenry, we must make it possible for these youngsters to participate in aviation through a subsidized program, financed by Industry or State and Federal Government.

Unfortunately, whenever industry or government has been approached to foster a glider program for our young people, the persons contacted seem able to remember only the unfortunate experience with gliders in the early 1930's. Somehow we have failed to impress on most leaders in aviation that soaring is safe, that significant progress has been made in the design and construction of motorless aircraft and that here is a medium through which we may capture and retain the interest of our youth in aviation.

We read constantly the remarks by our leaders in government and industry that we have an acute shortage of young people preparing for careers in the fields of engineering and science; a shortage of applicants for the Air Force Academy and a constant struggle to recruit sufficient young men for the Air Force and Navy flight schools. One of the reasons is the lack of long range planning to create an air-minded pool from which to draw young people into aviation. The way to solve this problem is to start an Air Youth program which will serve as an outlet for those who become interested in airplane model building, by carrying them to the next logical step in holding their interest, that of providing soaring training. The competition and sport which motorless flying stimulates cannot help but retain their interest.

It is time we removed our heads from the sand, and stopped thinking that soaring will grow spontaneously. We need a national program which will provide flying training to American youth.

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