

West Words

by LLOYD M. LICHER



Flying activity in Southern California is at a low ebb during the winter months although it does continue at the two main sites of El Mirage and Elsinore. A soarable wave was discovered over El Mirage Dry Lake coming from an east wind being deflected by the low Shadow Mountains. Altitudes attained in it were 4,600 feet above the ground.

At Elsinore the series of monthly weekend contests is continuing but drew all red air on its December dates. Other weekends have found plentiful lift on the nearby mountains and ridges; but it's lean season for thermals.

Bishop has seen less glider activity than in any recent wave season. Bob Schnelker had his and Frank Kerns' 1-26 there all during the holiday week in December and Duke Mancuso took his 1-23 up on the New Year weekend. Bob reported no wind and no clouds for all that time until December 30 and then the change did not produce any soaring conditions. The two ships have been left there, all outfitted for high-altitude flying, ready whenever a favorable weather forecast is received. The 1-26 is available for use by any qualified pilot on a commercial basis.

The only other glider at Bishop is a TG-3 owned by the Bishop Wave Workers, a small club spearheaded by Bob Symons. It has just been recovered and is about to be licensed.

A number of new clubs have recently been formed and are taking steps to get incorporated. The first was the Skylark Soaring Club under the guiding hand of Art Rowland. It is composed mostly of people with whom Art works in Pasadena, new to the sport. They have purchased the L-K "Green Demon" from Sterling Starr and plan to base it at Elsinore.

The next group to get going was the San Fernando Valley Glider Club. Pete Bonotaux helped form this one with the President, John S. Williams, from people with whom they work at Rocketdyne. John is a past tow pilot

at Elsinore. Their ship is the L-K formerly owned by Bob Schenbeck and Henry Babcock. Bob joined the club in the transaction. They too plan to base their operation at Elsinore but will also try out some new sites just west of the San Fernando Valley.

A third club was formed by some members of the San Gabriel Valley Soaring Group, most of whom work at the Aerojet-General Corporation. They are the Soarcerers, Inc. and have acquired the P-R formerly owned by Earl Nelson, with Earl becoming one of the seven members. Their flying will be done mainly at El Mirage.

Some revealing statistics have been gleaned from comparisons of current rosters for the fourteen glider clubs and associations in the Southern California area with that for SSA. In every case, no matter whether the club membership was on the order of ten to twenty for the ship owning clubs or one hundred plus for AGCSC or three hundred plus for SCSA, the fraction of members who were also in SSA was only one-fifth. It makes one wonder if this is not true for most of the clubs in the U. S. If all those people now in some form of soaring group were to become active members of SSA, what a strong organization it would be!

Ways to bring this about were discussed at a series of SSA membership meetings held in Southern California during December. The criticisms and suggestions resulting were summarized and sent to the officers of the Society for consideration at the first quarter, 1957 Board of Directors' meeting. One of the main points made was that the various local soaring clubs and groups must be brought closer to the running of SSA. A revised national structure was suggested which would allow for various forms of formal affiliation and perhaps have the SSA Board of Directors be composed of direct representatives, either from the clubs or by areas. Research into the why of so many soaring enthusiasts not being

members is also in order. It was concluded that more in the way of service and benefits by SSA would be necessary to induce the others to join, most of which would have to be on a local level by the Governors, Directors and Committees.

SCSA has recently adopted an "Affiliated Clubs" class of membership in an effort to tie together more closely the soaring activities in Southern California and perhaps act as a guide for similar SSA projects that could be done on a National scale. Among other things to be done for the affiliated clubs is the sponsorship of a contest for only club-owned ships. It should prove to be a good training ground for the new pilots who are learning how to fly in the clubs.

The SGCSC, Ltd. (San Diego club) put on a very interesting Christmas party at their December meeting. Various unrelated and impractical subjects on gliding were discussed extemporaneously by "experts" from the floor and everyone was given a humorous present. Highlight of the program was a glider contest in which everyone participated with nickel model gliders for spot landing and distance events. The serious side of the meeting concerned plans for the annual contest at Torrey Pines in February.

The SCSA held elections at their December meeting which put Bill Rodenberg in as President and Bill Aiken as Secretary. Plans for 1957 include the making of a movie on SCSA activities and some sort of contest for the many pilots who will be unable to attend the Nationals in Elmira. Publication of THE THERMAL has been turned over to a newly organized committee that expects to provide a more consistent and complete magazine. Starting with the February issue it will be printed rather than mimeographed. Subscription rate to non-residents of Los Angeles County is \$2.50 per year.

INTERESTING GLIDERS

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wires, a two-wheel strutted landing gear, and two open cockpits?

Whatever its actual performance was compared to its claimed performance, the Super Soarer has a secure place in American gliding history. Two of these two-wingers are still in existence; one stored in a barn in the mid-west and the other converted to a single-float seaplane powered with an inverted Model T Ford engine in Tacoma, Washington.