

SPIRALING AROUND ST. LOUIS

by FRED B. FRIEDEWALD

"The Sunday we dropped by the airport, a ritualistic ceremony known as a drag race, was in the progress at one end of the airport and several hundred teen-agers were in attendance to pay homage to the God of the Multiple-Carburetors. A sailplane floated silently over this noisy gathering.

'Hey! man, dig that crazy kite,' stated one worthy engaged in fitting acquaintance into the remnants of what apparently at one time had been an automobile.

'Looks dangerous to me,' sagely observed the driver, who then roared down the runway like a frustrated volcano on wheels." This is what John Keasler, noted Post Dispatch reporter, had to write about his first visit with the St. Louis Soaring Association, Inc.

The drag races were only one of the many problems the SLSA had to overcome in order to survive. The airport manager felt the additional revenue was needed, so the longest runway was leased every other Sunday to the dragsters. As a result we are getting very proficient at cross-wind take-offs.

The SLSA is one of the oldest incorporated glider clubs in the United States. It was incorporated on November 15, 1940. A few of the key figures in the early club were

Howard Blossom, John Kaufman (the K in L-K), Julius Tumavicas and many others well known in the soaring world at that time. The club property then consisted of a "Cinema" and a winch. Howard Blossom had his "Wolf" which he flew when he wasn't giving instruction in the club glider.

As a result of the war, the club was forced to sell their "Cinema" and most of the members moved away from the St. Louis area. The reason the club was never reactivated after the war was that gliders, and anything pertaining to them, had a black eye in the minds of the public. During a War Bond rally at Lambert Field, the Mayor and nine other persons met with death when a main strut fitting failed on a CG-4 troop glider. Later Randy Chapman met his death in the original Yankee Doodle, a forerunner of the L-K.

In 1955 steps were taken to reactivate the SLSA. On May 28, 1956, the SLSA was reactivated with four active members. During the first summer of operation a Cinema B and 175 hp PT-19 were purchased. The flying was very limited that summer because there was only one member with previous glider experience. The membership proved to be a determined group and set out to iron out all the bugs that winter.

In January of the next year, a membership drive was initiated. This was accomplished by holding an open house, publicity by radio, and feature articles in the newspapers. The summer of '57 found ten members in the club and a privately owned 1-26 and L-K. That summer the Club was blessed with excellent soaring weather. Flights over the airport of five hours and longer were logged. Cross country flights were not attempted because the members felt they should learn how to walk before they ran. The soaring weather was excellent until the end of November. An hour or two flight was logged every Sunday until that time. The end of November brought another privately owned L-K into the club, and two new members.

The present organization is sort of communistic in the sense that we use the "division of labor" policy to get the job done. The key personnel of our organization are the Manager of Flight Operations, Engineering Officer, Flight Instructor and Publicity Officer. In organizing in this manner, the blame can be placed on one individual if the job doesn't get done. This arrangement has been very successful but, as usual, the work seems to fall upon a select few. These few are the group who select themselves to do the work. So far, there have been no arguments or disagreements.

The Board of Governors has complete control of the Club. The Board consists of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Manager of Flight Operations and an Active member. It is difficult to hold a general meeting during the week because of the distance that separates the members. However, important business which cannot wait until Sunday can be administered by the Board by telephone.

The initiation fee is \$100.00 with \$5.00 a month dues. There are arrangements where this can be refunded if a member wishes to drop out of the club. Flight charges for the members are \$3.00 per hour for the use of the sailplane, and \$0.20 per min, plus \$1.00 towing charges. Passenger donations are \$0.30 per min. plus \$1.50 for the tow and \$5.00 per hr. for the sailplane. Winch tows are \$0.50 and private use of the towplane is \$7.50 per hr. These rates were adopted during the summer of '57 and by the end of that year the club was finally operating in the black.

Members of the St. Louis Soaring Ass'n., Inc., during the summer of 1957. L to R: Charles Yost, Dave Lobmaster, Joe Dobronski, Fred Finck, Everett Williston, Willi Geiselmann, Fred Friedewald, Don Statler and Raney Bell.

