

# HOW TO GET INTO SOARING

Many of you are reading SOARING magazine for the first time with this issue and getting an idea of how extensive the sport of soaring is in the United States. It is for you and other newcomers that the following is presented, to give a realistic picture of the sport and explain how you can become a part of it.

The sport centers around the equipment available, in this case gliders and sailplanes. (Sailplanes are high-performance gliders.) There is a total of about 500 in the U.S., with another 150 under construction. Of the 500, only two-thirds or 330 are active, the others being stored or undergoing maintenance. The total is split about evenly between two-place training types (mostly war surplus models) and single-place machines. Average cost of used sailplanes is \$1000 to \$1500, although high-performance machines are \$2500 to \$4000.

Private ownership of equipment is predominant in this country, however there are some 80 ship-owning soaring clubs. The clubs offer the best method for newcomers to get acquainted with soaring procedures and acquire the know-how essential for safe operations. These cannot be safely self-taught and anyone who builds or buys a sailplane and tries to operate it without experienced supervision is foolhardy. There are also a limited number of commercial soaring schools at widespread points. They can best be utilized by spending a vacation week at one, unless there happens to be one conveniently close to you.

The soaring clubs are fairly well distributed, although quite a few are concentrated near the large population centers of New York and Los Angeles. If there is not a club near you, a little concerted effort could create one that would bring many hours of soaring pleasure to you and your friends. Since sailplanes, by their nature, require other sources of power to be launched and moved on the ground, their operation logically becomes a group activity. The sport can be inexpensive only when participants do not consider their time as part of the cost.

The average soaring club has from 15 to 25 members, each owning an

equal share, or equity, in a two-place sailplane valued at about \$1200. The fee to join is then between \$50 and \$100, most of which is refundable upon withdrawal if a replacement is found. Monthly dues of a few dollars cover fixed costs such as insurance and hangar rent, while flying fees of a few dollars an hour cover maintenance and depreciation. Flight instruction is usually given free. Towing costs are extra and vary, depending on the method and whether or not the club owns the launching equipment. Members are expected to help with most maintenance work.

The most convenient method of launching is airplane tow, where a suitable airplane with an approved towing hook is used to tow the sailplane to 2000 or 3000 feet using a 200 foot length of rope, whereupon the sailplane pilot releases his end of the line and seeks out upcurrents with which to extend his flight. Some clubs have their own towplane, but the majority purchase tows from a commercial operator at the airport they fly from, at the rate of three to four dollars each. Such flights in stable air last about 20 minutes, although can last for many hours if soaring conditions are present. It is expensive to airplane tow without the prospect of some soaring.

The other methods of launching commonly used employ a 2500 to 4000 foot length of wire which is used to pull the sailplane into the air as a huge kite, either by a moving car or a stationary winch. Altitudes obtained are between 800 and 1500 feet. This is quite inexpensive and ideal for many repeated, short pattern flights to teach the landing judgement necessary for soloing.

The national soaring organization in the United States is The Soaring Society of America, Inc., which publishes this magazine, SOARING, as its bi-monthly journal. Many soaring clubs are formally affiliated with SSA and most of the others informally support the Society's objectives. Through its committees and full time office staff, SSA provides many services for newcomers to and persons in the sport of soaring. A comprehensive rental film library is maintained. Lists of soaring clubs, schools, new sailplanes, kits, plans,

used sailplanes, books and other materials for new clubs are offered free to help people become more active in the sport.

By joining the Society, you help make these services possible and lend support where it is needed to make soaring more enjoyable for all who wish to participate. Write now for the material you would like to receive and enclose a check for membership, which includes a subscription to SOARING magazine. Full Member: \$10.00, Associate: \$5.00. The address: The Soaring Society of America, Inc., Box 66071, Los Angeles 66, Calif.

## ELMIRA TO HOST NATIONALS

The bid of the Elmira Area Soaring Corporation to host the 1959 Annual U. S. National Soaring Competitions has been accepted by the SSA Board of Directors. Inclusive dates are to be Wednesday, July 1st, through Friday, July 10th, which will include the traditional July 4th week-end. Further information on plans and preparations for the contest will be published as it becomes known. The rules for the competitions should appear in the May-June SOARING.

The 1959 National Soaring Champion, as determined from this contest, will automatically be first pilot on the 1960 U. S. soaring team for the Internationals.

## U. S. Accepts West German Airworthiness Certificates

A bi-lateral airworthiness agreement between the U.S.A. and West Germany was approved by the U.S. Department of State on December 11th. Henceforth, an airworthiness certificate issued by the German government generally will be accepted automatically by our government. German certificated sailplanes will become eligible for a U.S. airworthiness certificate under Part 10 of the current Civil Air Regulations.

## SSA DIRECTORS TO MEET

The regular midwinter meeting of the SSA Board of Directors is scheduled for January 31st and February 1st in Denver, Colorado. Since the Board meets only twice a year, there is usually much business to transact, as the agenda for this meeting indicates. Important decisions and results will be published in the next Members' Newsletter and the March-April SOARING.