

## THE CHALLENGE OF BRITISH SOARING

For some time we have been contemplating an editorial salute to our soaring friends across the seas. Since this is the month of the international competition it is particularly appropriate at this time, although international competition is not our theme. Rather it is the accomplishment of many of the British pilots under adverse circumstances.

In the opinion of many, every one of our first 48 states has the equal or better soaring weather than in Britain. In a vast majority of them it is notably superior the year around. We have not had the chance to fly in the British Isles, but we were thinking about this situation a couple of weeks ago when we soared in the 50th state on the island of Oahu. Although ridge and mountain soaring are not difficult there, utilizing the steady trade winds, it is not generally known that thermal soaring can regularly be found in the lee valleys.

With the cloud base at 2800 feet and narrow thermals we were unable to keep the 2-22 aloft the first try, but seated in the more familiar 1-26 and spurred by an intense desire not to make another ignominious return in front of the local pilots, we finally understood what the Hawaiian cumuli were trying to tell us, and had a pleasant flight. Cruising over the luscious green of pineapple and sugar cane fields and with the ocean visible just 15 miles away in three directions, we could dimly visualize some of the problems of our English-speaking cousins with low cloud bases and stable air.

Two British flights reported last year should really give us cause for reflection. One is that of Kearon in the 1959 National Championships at Lasham who flew 134 miles and *never got more than 1000 feet above the ground*. The other was that of Stone who flew 300 km and never got above 3500 feet. That, gentlemen, is really working for your soaring! Although our top pilots have proved the equal of any, we wonder how the *average* American pilot would fare under these circumstances. Rather badly, we surmise.

In the matter of wave exploration and utilization we must again bow low to the British. From reading accounts of wave flights in "Sailplane & Gliding" it appears that their use of waves is much more extensive and skilful than ours. They are consistently reaching altitudes of six to eight times the height of the ridge in what would seem moderate winds to us. One looks in vain for such achievements in this country. We once said that not ten percent of the potential of wave soaring has been realized in the U.S. In the light of accomplishments abroad this figure should probably be reduced to five percent or less.

We haven't begun to realize the maximum potential of our meteorological and geographical advantages. With these inspiring examples from overseas let's raise our sights and make the most of our opportunities.

H.S.