

SCHWEIZER AIRCRAFT CORP. REPORT

by PAUL A. SCHWEIZER

In making our yearly report for 1959, we can look back at 1959 as a year that has seen a definite awakening of interest in soaring — and we can look forward to 1960 which should be a year of accelerated growth. There are many indications of this growth — the increased rate at which the SSA continues to sign up new members — the increased number of clubs and centers of soaring activity — and here at SAC, the doubling of our school activity and the steady growth of our sailplane sales. Another indication is the marked increase in the number of inquiry letters received — sometimes running almost as high as 100 per day. The SSA reports a similar increase in mail activity. All this indicates a healthy growth of the interest in soaring.

From our observation, it appears that the majority of those persons getting into soaring are power plane pilots. Many of these basically fly for fun and find that motorless flight provides an appealing and fascinating experience; as well as an interesting and challenging sport. Those who fly airplanes for business are finding soaring a refreshing and relaxing form of flight that puts the fun back into flying. Bob Buck, TWA Captain, who wrote of his introduction to soaring in *Air Facts* (and which was recently reprinted in *Reader's Digest*), is one of these who very clearly hits the nail on

the head in describing the appeal of soaring. The prejudice that most power pilots have had for an "airplane without a motor" is gradually being lifted, and it is felt that the power pilots provide a relatively unlimited source of soaring prospects, around which the soaring movement can grow. They fit in very quickly for they already know how to fly and are realistic about the cost of flying.

This does not mean that soaring is necessarily expensive and limited to power pilots, but rather, they are more understanding about the cost of flying than are most newcomers. As more activity springs up around the country and more clubs are organized, lower priced flying will be available to those who are ready and willing to help make this possible. Soaring is the ideal flying activity for young people and through the economies of a well-run club and through sponsorship of youth programs, increasing numbers of young people should be entering the sport. Along this line, the Civil Air Patrol is very much interested in a National Soaring Program and already there are a number of units with sailplane operations. The important thing here is that these units starting out be given proper guidance and supervision by experienced people so a safe operation results. There is always the temptation, when faced with a limited budget, of trying to get by

with some antiquated sailplane, or to use tow equipment that is inadequate for the job. It is up to the present SSA members to give these new groups as much guidance as they can so accidents can be avoided and soaring can become an important part of the CAP.

At Elmira, we are running a one week trial indoctrination course for 75 CAP Officers and Cadets from the New York State Wing of the CAP. National Headquarters will have an observer; as well as the other CAP Wings in the Northeast. The main purpose of this program is to familiarize the CAP with soaring and to show how it can fit into their program. Other two-day weekend indoctrination courses will be planned during the season, for CAP as well as for other groups. Such courses should be planned by other clubs, sailplane operators and groups around the country to help other groups get started.

We feel that another basis for the growth of soaring will come when it can be put on a pleasurable and convenient resort type of operation. In fact, we think that soaring today is similar to what skiing was 30 years ago. At that time skiing was not very popular and those involved in it were the dedicated enthusiasts who did not mind the many inconveniences, including climbing up mountains and driving distances to partake of their favorite sport. However, with the advent of the ski center, ski lodge and ski tow, the sport immediately started to grow until now the participants are in the millions.

We feel the same thing can happen to soaring if it is put on a basis that appeals to the whole family as in sailing, golf, skiing and boating. I think most persons will agree that a majority of those active in soaring for some time have been the dedicated enthusiasts who do not mind the inconveniences and hard work that quite often go with it. Such people are certainly the backbone of the SSA and probably always will be. On the other hand, there are, no doubt, unlimited numbers of people who would like to partake of soaring as they do of any other sport on a convenient, pleasurable and family basis; and they are ready to pay for this the same as they pay for boating, sailing, golf, skiing, sports cars, etc. If the interest is there, they can do soaring at about the same cost as for most other sports.

Another item that can be an important factor in the growth of soar-

A view of the latest Schweizer 1-26 on its trailer with a wing off to show the new fiberglass nose, smooth turtle deck and transparent rear deck.

Photo: Schweizer Aircraft Corp.

