

instructor. After six trips I was ready for solo in the docile old Sperlinger (Sparrow) shown in photo. Two young Swiss promptly adopted me to become my field crew, possibly so that the middle-aged American would not strain his heart running his wingtip the mile out to the take off site at a field elevation of 5660 feet. Thereafter, charming Maya Pozzoli, a hospital laboratory technician who was literally born on the airport (it was her father's farm), and Hans Benz, a young Swiss soaring pilot about to start his army duty, were nearby as translators and crew.

As a soaring site Samedan is both remarkable and spectacular. A ridge rises steeply for 2400 feet parallel to and right beside the airport and then turns away 75 degrees at the end. This insures ridge lift from southerlies and westerlies around an arc of over 200 degrees. Generally the Maloja Pass to Italy 15 miles west-southwest funnels the wind down the valley at this ridge. A winch launch to merely 900 feet starts one off on a spectacular climb. Only ridge lift was available during our short visit but I had enough to learn about mountain soaring so that I was not disappointed.

Just around the corner on the ridge from the airport is the famous mountain hotel, Muottas Muragl (pronounced mottas murile, with a slight gargle), at the head of a cog railroad. Sailplanes were once carried up by the cog cars, assembled at the top, and launched by rubber bungee from the sloping terrace below the hotel.

Climbing above Muottas against Piz Languard (10,700 feet), a sailplane pilot looks eight miles west across the Flaz valley at a magnificent mountain group — Piz Palu (12,800) and Piz Bernina (13,300 feet) with their great glacier flowing out toward him. Twenty miles south are the peaks of Italian Alps. Forty miles northeast is the Austrian Tyrol. North and west is the "lost horizon" of the most rugged part of Switzerland. On many days thermals accelerate against the sunwarmed rocks and make ridgehopping possible at altitudes of over 14,000 feet. Complex wave lift is frequent.

Long flights have been made to and from Samedan. A team of five sailplanes soared in one day in 1959 from Austria, intending to make another goal flight the following day westward across Switzerland to Nyon, near Geneva. Refused permis-



Photo by Rose Marie Licher

The "Dottie S," a medium performance original/hybrid sailplane began as a High School project and finished at Mississippi State University by George Bennett and Richard Carter with the help of Guy Storer. The 49 ft. wings were based on the smaller ones of Art Shultz's "Midwest," the horizontal tail is from an L-K, the vertical tail was scaled down from that of a TG-3A and the steel tube fuselage is original. The nose is now being modified and a wheel will be installed to replace the dolly. Specs: wing area, 160 sq. ft.; aspect ratio, 15; airfoil, 4415; empty weight, 425 lb.; gross weight 625 lb.; and maximum L/D is now about 20 to 1.

sion for this flight, they nonchalantly flew back into a different section of Austria the next day. Both flights were over 150 miles.

Another interesting operation from Samedan is that of the ski-equipped glacier rescue aircraft, normally kept busy with sightseeing trips along the high peaks and glaciers. An American Super Cub complete with retractable skis and a glider hitch holds its own with Swiss and Czech-made competitors here.

Summer weekends and holidays bring Swiss soaring pilots and their ships to Samedan in large numbers. Traveling at night to avoid trailer tie-ups on the narrow and precipitous mountain roads, they line up for Herr Risch's big winch by midmorning. It is not uncommon for six or eight sailplanes to be working at various altitudes by noon.

One pilot brought his own winch, built into the trunk of his Buick with all the precision and compactness of a Swiss watch, as the photo shows.

The level-wind swings inside to permit the trunk lid to close. The winch differential is on far side. A double driveshaft take-off at the automatic transmission shifts either to the winch or the rear wheels so the winch-car can retrieve its own cable and carry it back to the start point. Photo shows the level-wind mechanism in position, complete with an emergency cable cutter—a chisel driven by a blank rifle cartridge electrically fired from the operator's seat.

Few soaring sites in the world rival Samedan in the towering grandeur of their surroundings. For the record, we visited Zell-am-See in Austria near the Gross Glockner, the highest peak of the Austrian Tyrol, and concede it to be a close second. But Samedan (pronounced sa-mah-den or sa-may-den) will see us back one day soon. A letter to Herr Risch will give him time to book a sailplane for me and confirm — even the old Sparrow will do.

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