

# LET'S SELL SOARING -- AND SSA!

EDITORIAL

How large should the American soaring movement be? Does SSA have enough members? Should we try to sell soaring to more people? These questions are good for a lively argument, and a legitimate difference of opinion, among soaring people. There are certainly members of SSA who feel that soaring in the United States is already big enough, that as long as they themselves can get a tow there is no use selling soaring to others, that more recruits would simply mean more students who would have to be taught to fly, clutter up the air, etc. Needless to say, the members of the Membership Committee do not share this viewpoint, or we wouldn't be working on this particular committee! However, these questions, and views, deserve a considered answer — as we launch the 1961 EMGAM Membership Contest which we hope will be successful in bringing many new recruits into soaring and SSA.

The first question is admittedly not subject to any hard and fast answer, and the third is largely a matter of personal altruism — wanting to share with others this beautiful, thrilling, exciting, and utterly fascinating sport which we so enjoy and, once infected with, can't leave alone. Certainly we don't want to recruit a lot of "bodies," just for the sake of numbers, or to try to sell soaring to people who have no business flying and who might bring tragedy to themselves — and a black eye to soaring. But for fellow pilots for whom the lure of power flying has begun to pale, for the rare type of individual who yearns for the solitude of the summits, the lure of distant horizons, who thrills at the sight of a soaring bird, or of a sailboat beating to windward, we have something to offer, and it would be a pity if these people were to miss the experience of soaring because of lack of effort on our part. That, at least, is the way I see it.

The second question seems less argumentative, and less idealistic. SSA needs more members desperately in order to balance its books, get the operation in the black, and discharge its obligations to its members. As most of us are probably aware, we have been operating for some years on a declining subsidy and it behooves us to increase our membership substantially if we are now to pay our own way — and to make good on the series of important programs the Directors have, with sober deliberation and general approval of the Membership, embarked on in the last several years. These are all aimed at better serving the best interests of the members and the sport, and have included the setting up of a full-time executive secretary, monthly publication of *Soaring*, writing and issuing the "American Soaring Handbook," and many others — some of our activities, and those of our individual members.

Among the latter, we need a program to better represent our interests to FAA, FCC, Congress and other governmental agencies which affect or control our activities, and those of our individual members. We must vigorously defend our rights. We cannot expect AOPA, ALPA, NAA, or any other group, to fight our battles for us. As crowding of the air space increases and spectacular accidents bring the clamor for more regulation, we will be left out in the cold if we aren't "in there pitching." So far, we have been fairly lucky. But, we can't just trust this luck to continue. If there were no other reason for needing a large, aggressive, vocal Soaring Society, this alone would be sufficient.

Unless we take action soon, it may be too late — and the fellow who is content if he can get a tow may find that he is barred from the air!

There are, of course, many other benefits that would accrue from a larger American soaring movement, and all of which are important to the individual enthusiast. Thus, not only are the skies over the United States getting crowded, it is also getting crowded here on the ground. As Suburbia spreads out, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a place to glide, Club-owned and operated sites, or commercial operations catering to sailplane pilots, are one answer. But both of these require a broad base of support. Thus, a lot more enthusiasts are needed! And speaking of soaring sites, how many places are there in the U.S. where one can go for a soaring vacation, knowing that towing facilities, official observers, and possibly rental sailplanes and lodging will be available? — Precious few, because the U. S. soaring movement isn't big enough to support many such places.

Then there is the matter of American sailplanes. Paul Schweizer is definitely one SSA member who doesn't feel that we are nearly big enough. As he emphatically pointed out to me last summer, the American soaring movement is not large enough to support *even one* full-time sailplane manufacturer. If sailplane design and construction were not a hobby, and philanthropy, with the Schweizers, Brieglebs, and a few other dedicated people, American soaring would be in a sorry position indeed. We must get the demand and volume up before American sailplanes can compete in price with European imports. While espousing on this subject, Paul also pointed out that, except for the Skyrafter radios, there are virtually no American-made sailplane instruments — again because the demand is too small.

The question of whether the U. S. should host the next World Soaring Championships has been receiving a lot of serious consideration from the Officers and Directors of the Society. But, could we carry it out with our present membership of less than 3000? Even if finances were no problem (and they certainly are) it seems unlikely that we could count on enough volunteer workers to man the very many jobs that would have to be done. By contrast to our modest size, the British Gliding Association (which held the '56 Internationals) has over 8000 members, and the Germans can call on 50,000.

These are some of the reasons why we need a larger number of soaring enthusiasts. One could also point out that most of the soaring in the U.S. is concentrated in just a few areas, and not necessarily those with the best potential. Some states with superb soaring conditions (perhaps even better than Texas!) boast not a single sailplane. How much soaring is being done in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Western Colorado, or Utah, for instance?

I hope these examples will convince every SSA member that he should sign up all the new members he can. If each of us would renew our membership and sign up *one* new member, our immediate financial problems would be solved and SSA could speak with the authority of 6000 members. So let's get busy and *sell soaring — and SSA in 1961!*

BOB MOORE, *Chairman*  
SSA Membership Committee