

HORIZONTAL VS. VERTICAL GLIDERS

by TOM LEE

The local cloud-bumpers around Sacramento made the mistake of allowing a "ragbagger" (small boat sailor) to join their organization last fall. Naturally, not being a sharp pilot, I had to contrive to switch the conversation to sailing once in a while in order to contribute my juicy tidbits to the hangar-flying session. The boys tolerated this up to a point, but finally figured on shutting me up for good by suggesting I write an article on the similarities between the two sports. Well, they really opened the hatches with that one—whoever heard of a sailor resisting the chance to spin a yarn?

By golly, skippers, the two sports do have a lot in common. You see; we are on common ground already! We are both skippers. You use the word SAIL all the time as a prefix to the word plane. You also really make me feel at home with talks about regattas and point scores. You fellows are pikers on the point score business though, for sailors have at least 8 or 10 types of scoring systems. The common language between us goes on and on. Take rudder, compass, charts and navigation, all common terms to both groups. We both use airspeed indicators. I even saw one smart aleck sailor with a nautical version of a turn and bank indicator used to check the fore and aft trim of his ship.

So we have a common language between the groups. But we have a lot, lot more in common. I think the major factor in both sports is the challenge of the elements and the competition between men. There's no denying the thrill of challenging Mother Nature in all of her moods in a sailboat. I'm firmly convinced the thrill is just as great in a sailplane—maybe greater. Man has had thousands of years to practice against the elements on water. But there apparently is still very much to be learned about the flying elements. So glider pilots have the thrill of the unknown. I'm just grateful some other men have risked their necks to find the knowledge that is now available to me. After all, this challenge bit can go just so far!

Another common point is meteorology. We sure have something in

common here but with an interesting twist. Sailors scrape the bottom of the weather barrel. Fliers see, enjoy and sometimes use the whole vertical panorama of weather. Sailors look and pray for horizontal wind just as much as fliers do for vertical wind. Sailors delight in wind shifts just as you delight in finding the sink shifting to lift. Interestingly enough, they both create the same effect in that they change the angle of wind relative to the airfoil. Sailors call it a lift if it changes in such a direction as to allow them to reach their goal more easily.

A few of the writers in the field of gliding have remarked that airplanes could have been here years earlier had people but stopped to consider the wing of a bird. Gentlemen, I may be prejudiced, but I submit this is where the better sail designs came from. What should have been done was to turn a sail into the horizontal plane and it would have flown. It has taken aviation engineers 75 years to stumble onto this fact. Now they are making gliders that look like tipped over lantern-rigged scows. Big deal!

But I'm off the course. Earlier I mentioned a twist. Well, ever since coming to Sacramento three years ago and sailing in the lousy light winds at Lake Folsom, I have been curious about a peculiar light wind from the reverse direction at one spot. This spot is about 200 feet below a hill and right up against the shore. The twist is that it took glider training to make me realize why this breeze would spring up every ten minutes or so. Have you guessed it?

Seems that half way up the hill there is a huge parking lot with a nice black surface receiving the full heat of the sun. Furthermore, it is sheltered from the wind. Need I say more? Someday, if I ever get to fly cross-country, I'd sure like to make a pass over that spot!

There are probably hundreds of other common denominators between the sports, such as a sailboat stalls if the angle of attack is wrong, etc., but I think one of the most intriguing is the people. Both sports attract people from all walks of life and they find happiness in sharing something in common. It's surprising how closely the two follow in their organizational behavior. Even to the same pattern of friendly meetings at various members' homes. Both have friendly competition and share a good-natured laugh at their minor troubles.

Now that I'm all worked up on gliding there is only one problem left. I still would like to sail also. But from what I've seen, it looks like good gliding weather is also good sailing weather. Anyone for Schizophrenia?

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