

# A LETTER TO ED

by J. C. "RED" WRIGHT

*(Editor's note: The following is a satire on expensive soaring, with no serious implication intended. As "Red" said in giving permission to print it, "We all know that at times we go a little overboard on our hobby, but I guess it's worth it. At least, I have never encountered anything I enjoyed as much as I do soaring activity." Few enthusiasts today try to sell soaring as an inexpensive way to fly although it can be if time is substituted for money, as in some types of club operations, or if one settles for older equipment. Auto towing a spartan Schweizer 1-19 would be about the minimum.)*

Dear Ed:

I saw Bill the other day and he showed me a letter he had received from you relating how you estimated your soaring time had cost you about \$133.33 per hour for your overall soaring flight time. Feller, I sure do envy you. I would appreciate it if you would let me in on the secret of how you got by so economically, you lucky rascal you. I have not been so lucky as you may see by my cost analysis I have set out below and how it all came about—here goes.

In 1960, the Soaring Society of America decided to have the National Championships in Odessa. Since I have been a power pilot for 33 years with some odd 6,000 hours plus, including a not inconsiderable stint in the military, I took it all in and met some of these intriguing people and subsequently was bitten by the bug to take on a chunk of this simple, inexpensive sport. No engine maintenance, no fuel to buy, etc. (you know).

I wrote to a nice feller down in Florida that had a late model, low-time 1-23G for sale. He said press of business precluded him from further enjoying this wonderful sport and he would reluctantly part with his ship and trailer for \$4,700.00. (Now I know what he really

meant.) So after \$35.00 worth of phone calls, I agreed to purchase the ship and set out for Florida in my trusty Bonanza. Twelve hours flight time @ \$20.00 per hour—\$240.00, plus meals and hotel—\$48.00, and had a hired driver come down to Florida in my car to tow the 1-23 back to Odessa—3600 miles round trip @ \$.10 per mile—\$360.00, plus wages for driver—5 days @ \$30.00 per day—\$150.00 plus his road expenses of \$100.00, and when we all got back to Odessa, I settled down to enjoy some of this exhilarating and inexpensive sport, and in the past 22 months that I have been in the soaring game, there have been a few other little incidentals such as hangar rent and a new chute with a soft back pack—\$550.00 and \$49.50, the chute has been repacked @ \$5.00 each—4 times—\$20.00, and a few spare parts such as spar pins, etc.—\$23.78, and some skid repairs and repaint work @ \$112.00, plus two periodic inspections yearly—\$150.00, and of course, insurance @ \$17.98 per month—\$395.56.

Becoming somewhat disenchanted with pushing the craft around by hand, I had built a very nice dolly @ \$460.00, which worked so well it became apparent that a jeep to tow it would almost be indispensable, so for a modest sum of \$1,000.00, I was able to secure one for this purpose. Of course, I could not think of not belonging to SSA for the measly sum of \$10.00 yearly, which comes to \$20.00, and a few choice books by distinguished soaring pilots—\$18.00; to learn to better appreciate the finer points of soaring, envisioning the possibility of getting to a high altitude I added some pressure breathing equipment which only came to \$75.00, and then the intriguing prospect that there might be a very good standing wave emanating off the Guadalupe range of mountains, we organized a camp out to that area and the time and incidentals of this trip came to a slight consideration of \$416.00 for the time, crew, car and tow ship. However, after five days of wishful thinking, we had to abandon this safari as a dry run.

This did bring to my attention that a camera would be an absolute must to photograph turn points, etc., so \$125.00 was invested in this necessity, and of course, it had already become apparent that no self-respecting sailplane pilot would be caught without a barograph—\$198.00, and a good light-weight, solid-state transistorized VHF radio that had a light battery pack—\$644.50, and after some research in meteorology revealed that at high altitude the canopy would ice over and there would be a real need for an artificial horizon and that one could practically steal one with a transistorized power supply and with trustworthy J-8 instrument for \$275.00, which of course I did, but an ordinary dry battery pack would not sufficiently power the instrument and—lucky me—I was able to obtain a 12-volt, 9-ampere-hour nickel cadmium battery for only \$153.00, which could be recharged with a constant rate charger that sells for only \$48.00.

However, the J-8 proved to be slightly eccentric in turns by about 30 degrees and fortunately (how lucky can you get), I was able to get a very fancy one to replace it for the niggardly sum of \$450.00.

Now that I had begun to acquire some basic equipment to fly with including Memphis Variometer at \$125.00, and an Airpath Compass @ \$17.50, and a nice 8-day clock for \$25.00, with a simply delicious Helicopter Airspeed @ \$55.00, and a quite nice Allen Turn and Bank @ \$140.00, I began to fly in earnest. Subsequently, I hired 160 aero tows @ \$5.00—\$800.00, 4 aero retrieves @ \$15.00 each—\$60.00, and had a trailer hitch installed on my car and trailer lights for \$47.00, which enabled a crew to follow me for 1700 miles @ \$.12 per mile—\$204.00.

But, alas and alack, I began to worry so much about the cost and pursuing the will "o" the wisp of the Odessa myth and trying to qualify for a couple of merit badges so generously awarded by the SSA that I generated a couple of companionable ulcers which cost me a doctor bill of \$300.00, which I thought was a little stiff, but I got even with the joker of a "saw-bones" because he got hooked with the soaring bug and he is going to need more than my \$300.00 before he is cured. Then I managed to knock off a fairly respectable cross-

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