

SCHWEIZER AIRCRAFT CORPORATION REPORT

by PAUL A. SCHWEIZER, Vice-President

Those of you who have been readers of *Soaring* for some time are familiar with the SAC report that we make each spring. We try to bring you up to date on our activities during the previous year, as well as to give you our beliefs regarding soaring, sailplanes and future trends, based upon over thirty years' experience in the field.

In the January issue of *Soaring*, Pete Bowers in his article, "Some Comments on Modern Soaring," takes a step away from the "forest" to look at the soaring movement's "trees" and to raise many questions concerning it. We feel that articles such as this are healthy for the sport; and the resulting controversy and comments, besides providing interesting discussions, also have a beneficial effect on the movement.

Since we at SAC are very much involved with soaring and concerned with its future, we have discussed this article at length and feel it is appropriate to include in this SAC report some comments on this editorial. We agree with Pete on some of the points he makes, but we also disagree with some of his comments, and we feel that we should explain why.

We are first to agree that the soaring movement needs growth, for in a country of our size, a national organization that has less than 5,000 members certainly needs

to grow. Compared to most European countries, our soaring movement also is woefully small and unable to support its own soaring industry — too small even to have its own books, instruments and accessories. Also, in the growing battle for air space, soaring is not going to have much of a share, unless it can grow bigger and more influential.

Although more growth is needed, it seems that Pete overlooks the healthy growth that soaring has made in the last five years, during which period the SSA has almost quadrupled in size, and all phases of sailplane activity have been on the increase. At SAC, we confirm this increase, and in 1963 we had a record year with sailplane sales being 50% over 1962. There are many symptoms that soaring is on the threshold of an explosive growth, and the situation may turn around to where we have to be concerned with its growing too fast, as it did in the early thirties with resulting chaos.

When Pete compares the small number of SSA members to the number of Experimental Aircraft Association members, he forgets that, with almost 100,000 airplanes and several hundred thousand pilots, airplanes already are commonplace and accepted in the U.S.A. On the other hand, soaring is a

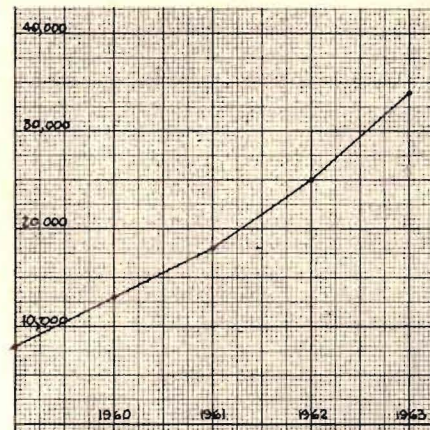


Fig. 1. Number of flights by Schweizer dealer organization from 1959 through 1963 (totally owned or operated Schweizer sailplanes).

relatively unknown activity to most people, and there is no ready-made market. Hence, it is necessary to expose the public to soaring through publicity, advertisements, introductory sailplane rides and instruction courses. Who is going to build a sailplane if he hasn't even seen one, let alone flown in one? We feel that the availability of introductory rides and courses at commercial sailplane operations has been an important factor in making soaring grow during the last five years. In our dealer organization, we now have 28 dealers, whereas five years ago there were less than 10. In 1959, our dealer organization made a total of 8,000 flights, whereas in 1963 they made almost 34,000 flights, quadruple the number. (See Fig. 1.)

Apparently, Pete's main answer to the growth problem is to offer the Experimental Aircraft Association "idea" and home-built, experimental sailplanes. We feel we are well qualified to comment on this, for home building of experimental gliders was the way in which we started in the thirties, and we have been following the home-built movement and the EAA for many years. We feel the EAA is a fine movement of particular interest to those principally interested in building their own design. This has been, and will continue to be, an interesting and beneficial part of the soaring movement. However, to imply that an EAA soaring movement within the SSA is the complete answer to our growth problem is unrealistic.

It appears to us that the EAA primarily is a designing and build-

A number of the Schweizer dealers with company notables during their meeting in Elmira last fall. Paul, Ernie and Will Schweizer are standing, 2nd, 3rd and 5th from left, respectively.

