

## **AN EDITORIAL**

# **SOME COMMENTS ON MODERN SOARING—HERESY OR HORSE SENSE?**

by PETER M. BOWERS  
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Many of us who have been closely associated with soaring and the SSA for a long time seem to be in the position of being too close to the forest to see the trees. We are vaguely aware of the fact that the sport and the organization are not growing as they should, but we do not feel that this is because there is anything basically wrong with them. We know that we have problems, but we can't see them clearly.

In spite of what some outsiders may think about an activity involving flight in unpowered aircraft, soaring is essentially a conservative sport that is supported by conservative and extremely dedicated people. This is a mixed blessing. It is largely responsible for our good safety record because the amount of work that must be put into the operation before any benefits at all can be realized discourages the "Hot Rod" element to the extent that soaring is practically free of this type, which is such a headache in other technical sports that offer a greater degree of instant results. On the other hand, a major disadvantage resulting from the preponderance of the conservative element is rigid maintenance of the status quo. What was good enough for Wolfgang Klemperer in 1921 (no personal reflection here) should be good enough for Joe Doakes in 1963. There have been

no fundamental improvements in sailplane design since the "Vampyr" of 1923. True, there have been advances in aerodynamics and structure that have resulted from the improved state-of-the-art of aviation in general, towplanes instead of bungee crews for launch, variometers that make thermal soaring possible, radio for communication, and ever-increasing performance that results from refinement of the Vampyr design. There has been no change in fundamental operating concepts calling for a change in the basic design of the aircraft.

With all of these improvements, a good reputation won after long hard years of climbing up out of the "Nut" category, and greatly increased interest in flying on the part of the public at large, we should be a much larger and more effective organization. Why aren't we? Lets get out of the shade of our stately spruce trees and look at the activity in some equivalent organizations.

Take the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), an organization with objectives very similar to ours—recreational flying for amateur sportsmanpilots, dissemination of know-how among the members, and the buildup of an experience retention and talent pool. SSA was

Just in case you think that this opus represents the discontented ranting of an armchair philosopher who is safe in not having to practice what he preaches, be assured that such is not the case. The author has been active in soaring and SSA continuously for the past 13 years and intermittently for a number of years from 1935 to 1941. He has owned a variety of gliders and powerplanes and has been active in EAA for the past eight years. Consequently, he feels that he is well-qualified to make comparative analyses, especially since his soaring activity has slowed down sufficiently in recent years to enable him to back away from the trees far enough to get a good look at them and try to figure out WHY he and others have slowed down.

Further, and more important, he is technically qualified to follow the line of his own preaching. His philosophy on the benefits of simplified aircraft design and construction were sufficiently well received by EAA to win him first place in the design contest mentioned in the text. While his philosophy proved to be right in EAA, it may be all wet in soaring. Perhaps SSA should be content to remain an elite corps instead of becoming a full-fledged movement—only time will tell. In the meantime, however, the author has sufficient faith in his expressed beliefs about glider design and SSA's growth problem to expend the time, cost and effort necessary to develop and build a sailplane that could point the way to soaring's Model "T". Whether he is right or wrong, others who are concerned might like to know that someone IS trying to work the problem as he sees it in an attempt to speed up our present slow rate of progress.

organized in 1932 and has approximately 4500 members. EAA was formed in 1953 and is now past 16,000. While the two organizations have many similarities, including local chapters, national dues of \$10.00, and a slick-paper monthly magazine, there must be some terrific differences to produce the different growth rates. What are they?

To start with, EAA is a protestant organization. It bucks the prevailing industrial trend in at least two ways and gives the member something that general aviation cannot give him. First, it gives him something that is not on the market at any price. There is no general aviation equivalent of the sports car or the small pleasure boat. Production airplanes are "Transportation-winged automobiles rather than pleasure vehicles. Production is aimed at the four-place "Family" level, starting somewhere over \$10,000, and on upward to the business plane level where the air-

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