

GLIDER PILOT RATINGS — THE GROWTH PATTERN

by TOM PAGE, Director-at-Large.

How many glider pilots are there? Where are they? How do they acquire their ratings? How old are they? What other pilot ratings do they hold? How rapid is the glider pilot increase and in what combinations?

The annual Statistical Handbooks of Aviation published by the Federal Aviation Agency gives glider pilot data in such summary form that meaningful analysis is limited. In addition, the quality of information presently available on the recent activity of any pilots under their various ratings is limited to data fed back in notably unreliable form on medical certificate applications. Since a rated glider pilot can exercise his privilege with merely self-certification that "he has no known physical defect which makes him unable to pilot a glider," the F.A.A. has literally no way to tell the extent of use of glider ratings in so-called "active" status. (1)

In spite of the ambiguity of the data resulting from the difficulty in defining "active" glider pilot and the problem arising out of the holding of combinations of ratings by the same pilot, some overall measures can be drawn from published material. Table 1 shows the increases from 1952 in "active" glider-only and total glider ratings. The proportion of glider pilots among active pilots and total pilots seems to be increasing slowly.

Annual statistics also show that the increase in median age of glider-only rated pilots was marked from 1954 to 1961, indicating a lower increment from youthful than from midspan pilots in this period of overall growth. Although a general increase in active pilot median ages has been occurring, the following percentages below the ages of 30 and 40 for three groups indicate that the ageing process for the glider-only pilot population is more rapid than for active Private and Commercial ratings:



Photo by Alex Dawydoff

The steady annual increase in glider pilots ratings is a heartening sign of the growth of soaring. Expanded club activities and frequent contests have largely contributed to it.

Active pilots	Percentage under 30 years		Percentage under 40 years	
	1954	1961	1954	1961
Glider only	14.8	15.1	75.5	47.6
Private	32.0	22.8	72.7	62.9
Commercial	20.7	24.0	81.6	62.8

Source: F.A.A. Statistical Handbook of Aviation, annual series.

In order to produce even its summary data, however, the F.A.A. has to instruct its computer to re-gurgitate details. On glider pilot ratings these details are confided only to penciled worksheets down in the bowels of the organization. A little legwork in Washington, in connection with an ongoing re-

search study of soaring at the University of Illinois, found the right place to say please. Result: The worksheets of raw data could be borrowed or copied. (2)

Net year-to-year changes, compiled from these unpublished worksheets as Table 2, do give an indication of the growth in number of

Table 1. GLIDER ONLY AND TOTAL GLIDER RATINGS COMPARED TO ALL ACTIVE PILOTS AND TOTAL PILOTS, 1952 TO 1963 YEAR ENDS.

[Note: See text for ambiguity of "active" and "inactive."]

Year end	Glider only pilots	All active pilots	Total glider	Total pilots
1963	1,045	378,700	6,497	854,285
1962	967	365,971	6,026	830,220
1961	894	352,860	4,109	804,707
1960	802	348,062	4,974	783,232
1959	721	359,875	4,592	758,368
1958	674	354,365	4,271	731,078
1957	627	309,212	3,987	702,519
1956	590	259,567	3,789	669,079
1955(a)	128(a)	298,076	3,659	643,201
1954	534	349,729	3,512	613,695
1953	497	300,053	3,402	585,974
1952	503	257,778	3,365	581,218

a. Believed inaccurate during renewal period. Source: F.A.A. Statistical Handbook of Aviation, annual series; and Office of Management Services, Data Systems Division.

An L-Spatz and a Cherokee playing tag for altitude as the black surface below, bathed in the sun, sends its hot breath aloft.

Photo by George Uveges