

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welcome to New Zealand

Sir:

Perhaps you might like to mention the enthusiasm of the New Zealanders in your magazine and add that the Marlborough Gliding and Soaring Club, of which I am a committee member, would be very pleased to welcome any member of a United States gliding club in the event of a visit to my country. I would be confident in stating that any American gliding type would be welcomed by every club over here. There is a small group of Air Force servicemen living in our town who come from every corner of the U.S.A., so you would feel at home.

RAE KERR

Blenheim, South Island, New Zealand

Welcome to France

Sir:

Your September issue published a letter by Mr. Robert Graham concerning places to fly overseas. Being a soaring enthusiast, having appreciated a year of American welcome, and feeling that this will be an opportunity to give back a little of what I received in the States 15 years ago, I am proud to inform SSA members that I own an overseas soaring site and would be glad to receive anyone.

Our private airport is located in southeastern France at the foothills of the Alps and along the Drome River, between Crest and Die. The grass strip is 2,100 ft. long. There is a campsite at the airport, but those who do not like the outdoor life can find rooms and eating places in Saillans, two miles to the east.

During the summer we are host to many of the aero clubs from France and Germany. During 1966 we received three French and three German clubs who brought with them a great variety of equipment, both gliders and towplanes. Frequently we had as many as 16 gliders in the air at the same time. From mid-July to the end of August we flew a total of 1,419 hours, made 29 five-hour duration flights and 14 1000-meter altitude gains. Most of the resultant badges were obtained by pilots not yet 21 years of age.

We mainly practice ridge soaring since the field is only five minutes by aero tow from a ridge ten miles long. This ridge is exposed to the Mistral. Thermals are weak compared to what you are used to in Texas, but will be judged very good by Mr. Gil Parcell I'm sure! (Anyway, the fun is the same everywhere.)

Our ridge, *Rouchecourbe*, is famous from being used by so many pilots. Paul MacCready certainly remembers the time he used it on his way from St. Auban or Hyères during the 1956 World Championships. Once on top of it one can travel around a lot in every direction, knowing he can fly back and regain lost altitude.

American pilots are invited to come particularly in July or August when they will have the opportunity to enjoy what is the friendly mood of a gathering of more than 200 soaring enthusiasts — aged two to sixty. Besides the flying we have a lot of fun around the camp fire, diving board or (almost every night after tie-down when the hero of the day must

pay), a bottle of sparkling Clairette. But certainly the great event of the meet is the traditional *Méchoui* or African-style barbecue at which five lambs are roasted over the camp fire, two barrels of wine are opened, and songs are sung far into the night. For more information write to:

RENE ET YVAN CHIVRE

Aubenasson

26 Drome

France

Hear, Hear!

Sir:

During one retrieve at the Nationals I went swimming in a mountain stream. While disrobing my hearing aid fell out of my shirt pocket and spent the night in the California dew many miles from home base. My alert and untiring crew member, North West, commandeered a Suzuki to go hunt. After the Suzuki packed up North left it and, after a 20-mile forced march into and out of the hills, was able to retrieve the solid-state electronic marvel. He then thumbed a ride in a jeep with an intoxicated ranch hand and, at length, arrived back in Reno.

The following day my solid-state marvel was even more solid and kept cutting on and off. I had just thought of something disagreeable to say to my crew, and was hurrying out to say it before I forgot, when Becky Ivans motioned to me to come over and meet some people she was with. She was standing with several gentlemen and a very striking girl. I clicked my tennis shoe heels and was taking the surprised girl's hand when the hearing aid woke up and I heard Becky say, "That's not General Allen!"

STEPHEN DUPONT

Fairfield, Conn.

Soaring's Weakness

Sir:

I have some constructive criticisms of what I consider to be serious weaknesses in *Soaring* magazine. If I were the only one who had these views this letter would be insignificant, but I have talked with a number of soaring people and many agreed with my basic ideas. The Letters to the Editor column should contain both pros and cons and should be a place for individual's opinions to be heard.

The popularity of soaring has tremendous potential for expansion in the next few years. *Soaring* magazine is in the best position to promote this movement, and this certainly should be one of the main goals of the magazine. However, *Soaring* is failing to interest the recreational pilots and those just getting into the sport, the two groups it should be most anxious to attract, because of its concentration on competition soaring, high-performance sailplanes, and records flying. That *Soaring* has failed to retain the interest of these people is proven by the fact that although the magazine gets hundreds of new subscriptions annually from students of commercial soaring schools and clubs, the attrition rate has just about equaled the number of new subscribers during the last several years.

Soaring must have greater appeal for the beginner and recreational soaring pilot if it is going to help promote the sport the way it should. For the majority of

the readers, flying sailplanes is just a hobby, and although they might find the exploits of top competition pilots interesting, this is a type of soaring they do not know and are not qualified to try safely. Saturating *Soaring* with articles on high-powered soaring creates a false image of what soaring is for the majority. *Soaring* should be much more than an adventure magazine for powerless flight. Properly directed, it should be entertaining as well as add to the skill and knowledge of those who read it. It must have better balance with more articles geared to the casual pilot and beginner if it is to be of interest to the majority and help the sport to grow.

Not only has this emphasis on competition and high-performance caused a loss of interest for some, but it has also hurt soaring by changing the image of the sport. *Soaring's* influence on the sport is tremendous because it is the only exposure many sailplane pilots have outside of their local organizations. With all the attention given to high-performance sailplanes and soaring meets throughout the world, the image of soaring has become the sexy, streamlined competition sailplane. The result of this image is that a large number of U.S. soaring pilots are paying high prices for the prestige of owning these exotic 40-to-1 bombs. Unless a person is interested in competing in national contests or setting records, why is a fast competition ship like this necessary? What most do not realize is that just having a high-performance sailplane will not make them a good pilot or guarantee them their Diamond badge. On the contrary, these sailplanes are sensitive sirens, and they require much more ability and experience to fly safely. In my opinion, the tremendous rise in the accident rate during the last few years can be directly attributed to this "high-performance mania" and to the people with insufficient experience wanting the prestige of a competition sailplane and trying to fly in a manner that only the most able pilots are capable of handling.

The point is that the lack of attention being paid to the more recreational type of sailplanes and soaring is leading pilots into a type of soaring which is more dangerous, expensive, and demanding, and one that should not be attempted casually. As far as local soaring, relaxed competition, and soaring for badges is concerned, there is nothing which can not be achieved with a sailplane like the 1-26. A ship of this type also has a tremendous amount to offer in terms of safety, reliability, and economy. Isn't this a better and more accurate image for soaring than that which *Soaring* is creating, of exotic sailplanes and competition which restricts the sport to the rich or those completely devoted to it?

Certainly *Soaring* should contain something for all levels of interest. As it is now however, the magazine is being dominated by just one aspect of the sport. The result has been a failure to hold the interest of those for whom soaring is not the only way of life, and an unfortunate change in the image which besides being inaccurate, is detrimental to the sport. Until a conscientious effort is made to broaden *Soaring's* appeal, the soaring movement in this country will suffer.

PAUL HARDY

Hanover, N.H.