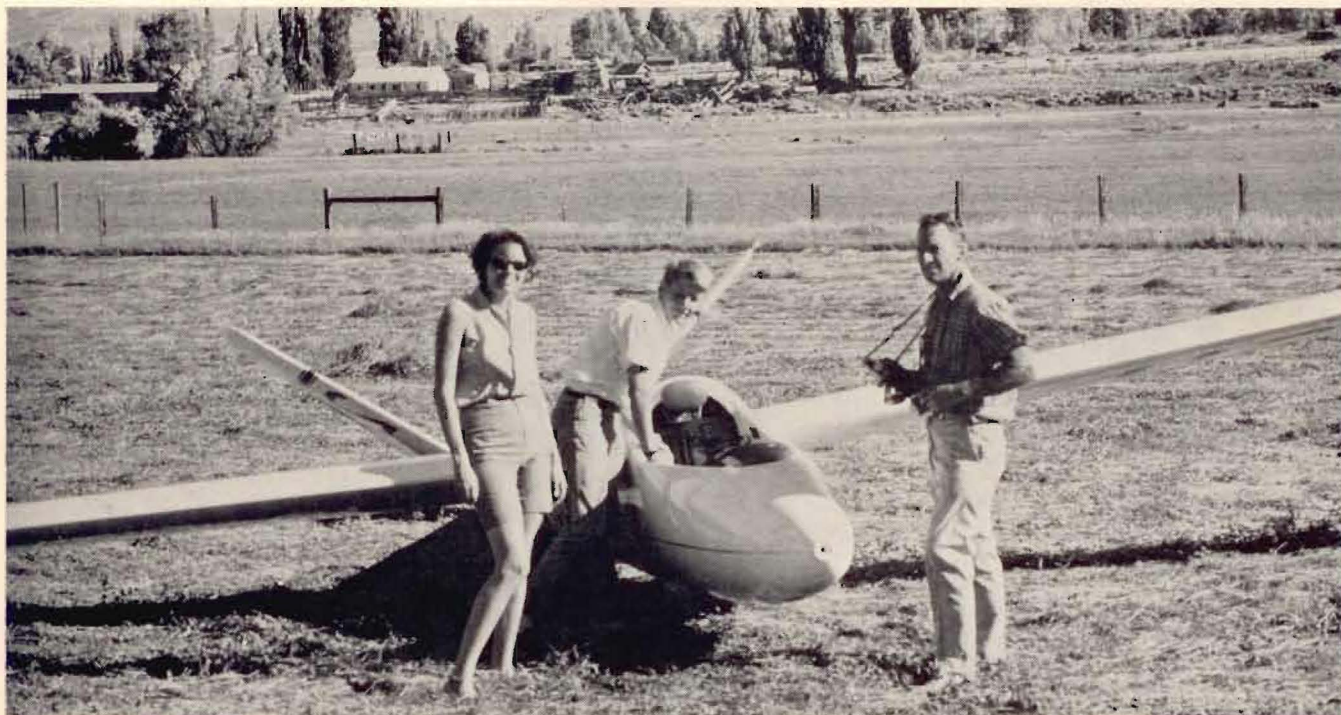


REFLECTIONS ON BEING 51st

STEPHEN duPONT



Steve duPont (at right, with camera) knows that an early landing is essential if one hopes to place 51st in the National Soaring Championships. But with this sort of a scene—that's Jan Charchian at left—who needs all those trophies?

There are some who feel that the U.S. Soaring Contest should be conducted solely to satisfy the stated aim of the SSA which is to select a national champion, and should be limited to a small number of top competition pilots as chosen by the results of regional contests. Many, however, think of it as I do, as the Magnificent Adventure, and feel that by competing directly with the best pilots from other regions, and far from home terrain, we can see how we really stack up against others who we otherwise would only read about. And when else could we spend 10 days soaring with an organized crew and a top meteorologist at our service? As in the great ocean-sailing races, where any knowledgeable yacht skipper can enter his boat, limited only by satisfactory equipment and a clean sporting reputation, the winners have the glory and the rest the great experience. And they all get to know each other face to face. All this, of course, must be in keeping with safety considerations and a manageable contest.

In my own case I like to comfort myself by the view that being 51st out of 65 contestants is really winning, if only a little bit. Especially after the 1965 contest when I finished last and thus didn't win at all. Then, of course, if Dick Schreder and Dick Johnson were the only two competitors somebody would get last for sure.

As a consequence of such performance as my own, there is bound to be soul searching and, like the beer ad, I don't know what I'm doing, but it must be

something wrong. My thinking goes as follows, and the experts need read no further:

Each day at the pilots meeting in a National Soaring Meet, yesterday's winner is expected to describe how he attained the winning 1000 points. Several years of listening to these modest speeches, and questioning the daily winners on occasion, enabled me this year to surpass last year's national champion. He dropped ten places from last year's second place while I climbed fifteen places from last year's last place! Probably all crews compose speeches for their champion in the event that he might win the 1000 points some day and my crew did not shirk their responsibility. They would have had me say: "Well, it was really rather easy after having received advice from a many-times national champion, from a multi-times winner of the Stroukoff trophy, from numerous Presidents of the Soaring Society, past and present, from the holder of the world's altitude record, from the holder of several world triangle speed records, and from others (including Dale May). It seems only fair to pass on to all of you what they said. What they told me, gentlemen, was *nuthin'*."

While composing this speech my ghost writers may have overlooked the possibility that my successes could be due to having done *nuthin'* they said. But what they really did tell me was to stay high, fly at best L/D, fly at best glide angle, speed up in down and slow up in lift, fly steadily at all times, fly at ninety-five . . . etc.