

# **Come outside and say that ...!**

**choice editorials and opinion  
from 26 years of free flight**

**Tony Burton, editor**

# free flight opinions



## Opinions – boy, what did we do before the SAC Forum discussion pages!

Well, comment and opinion was a bit slower circulating then but by no means any less heated, and the introduction of the SAC Roundtable (now Forum) has given everyone the ability to instantly publish their thoughts.

Those hot buttons are mostly the same, so I thought that it might be instructive if I collected a lot of the material that has appeared in *free flight* over the years. Some of the authors are highly respected international figures – if they wish to rant, it's probably worthwhile to consider what they say.

You might be surprised to find that your current pet peeve is almost as old as our association itself. So, if you think some aspect of this wonderful sport is going to hell in a hand-basket, consider doing a little remedial reading first – an old rant could either answer your complaint, or add ammunition to it!

The subject matter is consistent: the newest changes in the national organization, the “state-of-the-sport”, technology, contests, and badge rules are BAD; not only that, it's likely that your club hardly has a clue as to what it's doing, why it exists, or how to treat its “market”, even if it knew what it was. The content is divided into three parts, with each entry in order of issue date (almost). You will see a lot of good ideas from the 1980s and up – I leave it to you to see what differences there are between then and now.

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# Desiderata



**G**O PLACIDLY AMID THE NOISE of the towplanes & remember what peace there is in the silence at 5000 feet • As far as possible without surrender, be on good terms with the towpilot • Speak your truth quietly & clearly; and listen to others, even the dull & ignorant – they too have their good flights • Avoid loud & aggressive persons, they are vexations when you are preparing to fly • If you compare yourself to others, you may become vain or bitter, for there always will be novices or Diamond pilots about • Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans; keep trying for that next badge leg • Exercise caution in competition, for contest pilots are full of guile • But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many pilots striving for height get help from those already in lift • Be yourself • Especially do not feign affectation • Neither be cynical about lift, for in the face of sink and poor landing areas it is as perennial as the grass • Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth – let the younger club members push the gliders to the flight line • Nurture strength of spirit to shield you when lift fails • But do not distress yourself over poor forecasts, many fears are born of fatigue & loneliness in the cockpit • Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with the controls • You are a child of the universe, no less than the power pilots & jet jockies – you have a right to some airspace • And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should • Therefore be at peace with the CFI, whatever you conceive him to be; and whatever your labours & aspirations this season, in the noise and confusion on the flight line, keep peace with your fellow pilots • With all its sham, drudgery & broken dreams, it is still a beautiful sport • Be careful • Soar to be happy •

*Found in the map pocket of an old 2–22, dated 1954.*



# Part 1

What's it all about  
anyway?

– the state of the sport –

# Get off your butts!

**Tony Burton** 1982/1

IT HAS BEEN SAID that in any large group or organization, 20% of the members do 80% of the work. The 80% will go along with the flow, or may bitch about almost anything – but they *will not* contribute. They may get so mad at some particular policy adopted in the club or SAC, they may even quit – loudly decrying the events as if they were acts of a spiteful fate. Friends, the “A” in SAC means ASSOCIATION. SAC is YOU, and YOU, and YOU – it is a democracy, not a dictatorship. It will only grow with the active participation of every member, but how many times has that been said by others only to go in one ear and out the other.

In a small club, active participation is a matter of survival, but as it grows, the seemingly inevitable 80/20 ratio gradually develops. My club, Cu Nim, is probably no different than any other large club in SAC. With 106 members, maybe 25 at most will show up for a meeting – always the same faces. The pilots with the most at stake in the future of their club, the new pilots, sadly under-represent themselves.

It has been suggested that in a society in which a person can satisfy most wants simply by putting dollars on the table, the lack of “sweat equity” devalues any personal satisfaction so obtained. In the good-old-days, gliding could mean committing 50-100 hours of labour towards building the primary trainer you flew, and teamwork to get bungee'd off the hillside. Nowadays, if you really want to see improvements in gliding at the club and at the national level, the effort to contribute YOUR 2 cents worth may come more from an ‘intellectual’ commitment which does not give the old instant gratification, but the commitment MUST still be made.

YOU – the Western pilot who wants to go to instructors school this year, are you willing to help your club sponsor it, have you asked them why they are not? Did you expect it to fall into your lap by magic?

YOU – the pilot who is happily content to screw holes in the sky over the airfield in your glass beauty. That ship exists and is yours because others before you wanted to go further, faster – have you helped organize a weekend contest or a regionals lately?

YOU – who sees some specific problem in the gliding movement and has a good idea, when is the last time you contacted your Zone Director?

YOU – the keen pilot eager to start on your own badge work, why are you waiting for the over-worked club maintenance man to fix the flat on the I-26 trailer?

What all this boils down to is that there are dues to pay in this sport beyond the club and SAC membership fees. Don't ask what SAC is doing for you – YOU are SAC!

I happened to see the minutes of the recent Board of Directors meeting in Halifax. The work that was covered astonished me. Their major efforts are going towards policy – the direction we are heading in the coming years. They *cannot* do the day-to-day stuff in isolation and without prompt and helpful input from all of us out here in the boondocks. If you feel isolated as a SAC member, but haven't contributed your ideas or active help, it's your own damn fault.

SAC'S communication problems can only be solved by communicating – what a novel idea! The SAC Directors and Committee chairmen, through *free flight* and club mailings, are slowly improving matters from the top down. YOU work from the bottom up. For example: in this issue of *free flight* there is a plea from Dave Marsden for input on the direction competitive soaring may go, John Firth is looking for suggestions on what content the first-ever cross-country course should have, and one small club is asking for information on using medium/high performance gliders for basic training. Don't for a moment think that others will handle it – get your finger out and write! or phone!



# Come outside and say that ...

*Thoughts on the state of the sport a propo the Canadian scene.*

**John Holland** 1984/4

DOING A STINT ON THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE began to broaden my thinking and more recently as chairman of the BGA Development Committee, faced with a decline in club membership, I have had to give the subject much more thought. I have been a member of a fairly well organized and (by national standards) efficient club. In this I have been lucky because although frustrated and embarrassed at times, I have been able to remain in the sport. Had I joined many of the other clubs I would have long since joined the ranks of the departed.

**Amateur management** Let's face it, the average gliding club organization is a prime example of the worst of amateur management. I have recently been told that the very word "management" frightens people away. The net result of this is that gliding is a sport in stagnation and we would be kidding ourselves if we believed it will all come right when the recession is over. During the last war people had to be directed into Services other than the RAF as every young man's ambition was to be a pilot, or at least be involved with flying. Since then there has been an unprecedented explosion in leisure activities and yet this air-minded population has passed the gliding movement by. If we don't feed in new members at the bottom, the top will wither and die. Not only that, if we become a small, minority interest we shall inevitably be buried in legislation by our bureaucratic brothers who will take no heed of our requirements, be they airspace, noise regulations, or any other petty legislation they may dream up.

One of our troubles is we have a handful of myths that seem to be passed on from generation to generation. Things like ... if you can't spend all day around the gliding club we don't want you. Who wants a lot of people gliding, they'll spoil it for us. Who wants a lot of people gliding, it's exclusive. Gliding is a lifestyle, that's all there's room for etc, etc. In other words gliding is not for you if you are a busy professional person, your wife is not prepared to become a gliding widow, if you are a young person just starting married life, if you have a big house or a garden to look after or just if you don't like standing around in a big field in your boots.

**Have a go to the bottom** Just to prove I'm not exaggerating, I know one very enthusiastic glider pilot who is now in a syndicate and going great guns. First year he went solo, second year he completed his Silver C and now he is starting his third year and going for his Gold. He happens to be a priest and joined his nearest club as an *ab-initio*. He presented himself at the crack of dawn on his first day and come the afternoon he didn't look like flying yet awhile and he had a wedding to perform. Not unreasonably he asked if they would excuse him whilst he nipped off to conduct these nuptials and was told, "You'll have to go to the bottom of the list if you do." Now he travels a long way to his present club, where he is an enthusiastic and much loved member, just because they take into consideration that he has a job of work to do on occasion.

If you think about the modern lifestyle with its hectic pressure, it's amazing we have anyone gliding. One thing is for sure, if we're going to celebrate another 50 years of British gliding then it's time for a new lifestyle. I don't mean so much in the few, semi-professional outfits we have. If they don't meet their customers' needs they go out of business (it is interesting though that their customers needs don't seem to include hanging around airfields!). I'm getting at all those outfits in the country where the "ordinary" gliding takes place and forms the majority of our movement.

Just because my old mum out in the wilds of Cheshire used to serve me a tomato with salt and vinegar for my tea is no reason for my children not to anticipate an occasional steak and chips. Just because your dad flew a Grunau Baby once every three weeks when his turn came up, is no reason for you to do the same.

Gliding is about flying, not talking about it. The aim of every gliding club should be to provide its members with the best value for money and to allow them to fly as often as they can, as cheaply as they can for as long (or as far) as they can. If you accept these principles then you cannot tolerate a situation where members are asked to spend all day on a site and then get one seven-minute flight. I hope by now you are asking yourself what we are going to do about it.

**Tidy up gliding** Well, we are going to try to start a national campaign to tidy up gliding. We are aiming to persuade clubs they need to operate efficiently and must look at their Management with a 'capital M' (good management can also mean cheaper gliding!). Members must look for more from their committees; membership of a committee is acceptance of a management task, not an ego trip so that you can show how important you are. The important thing is for you ordinary glider pilots to raise your sights and demand that your own club be the best in the west. And don't let your club pundits persuade you that you have already got it. ❖

# the striving state of mind

**Seth Schlifer** 1985/6

PRIOR TO MY TAKING UP THIS SPORT, I'd already read many books and magazine accounts of cross-country soaring flight, and the entire concept really thrilled me. The result was that even during my training period I used to range around a little. Of course, I'm not saying that my instructors and I would go cross-country during my training, but I was quite fond of wandering away in the 2-33, in many cases seven or eight miles. We would still be within gliding range of the field and I would fly so that at any moment we would be able to head back and arrive with a thousand feet or so in hand. My solo flights continued in the same manner, and as my abilities expanded, the 1-26 and 1-23 carried me around triangular and quadrangular courses which I would declare for myself after feeling out the first thermal of each flight. Thus, goals were set whenever possible, however modest.

Just as a sideline I'll mention that on days with no lift, I'd go up anyhow rather than sit on the ground complaining of the weather, still with a goal in mind. Rather than soaring goals however, unusual exercises of one sort or another were performed to the best of my abilities. Tight turns, spins, sideslips, slipping turns, "dutch rolls", stalls out of slips, spot landings both with and without spoilers, avoiding the use of wheel-brake whenever possible and working towards deadly accurate speed control and a straight yawstring. I considered a flight to be wasted if, during that flight, I could not learn something about the air, the glider, or myself. I can honestly say that none of these flights were wasted. I continue to fly with this philosophy. It is the biggest reason why I will never tire of this wonderful sport.

Go up sometime, even if there is a solid grey overcast – and I'm talking to you high-timers now as well – and fly with your eyes and ears opened up as far as you can get them and go up to practise something; anything. The low-timers especially will begin to feel like a dry sponge that has been dropped into the ocean.

I would often find that on days of "no-lift" or even of thick overcast, when everyone was going up just to practise circuits, lift of some sort was there to give me an extended flight. The key was in not accepting the "fact" that there was no lift no matter how cruddy the sky looked. Launch with the assumption that lift is there, and fly at the speeds which are appropriate for covering the most territory that you can in order to find it. Do not fly at minimum sink speed! Quite simply, this is the defeatist's style of flying, not the optimist's. Those who launch "just for the fun of it", having no expectation of finding any lift, are the least likely to find any.

By flying at minimum sink they may extend their flight maybe a minute, and learn nothing. But if you launch assuming that there is some lift somewhere if it can be found, then you are going to do your best and fly with sensitivity to the surrounding air. You will search around at best L/D speed, and if you are unlucky, will land after a flight lasting a couple of minutes less than the other pilot. But when the lift is found on one such flight as a result of your more persistent and efficient searching, you will circle under that grey sky and eventually land the envy of the flightline.

For me, a premier demonstration of this style of flying was performed on the day prior to a Regional competition at Ionia, Michigan, in 1978. Wil Schuemann took off in his ASW-12 into a sky covered with an absolutely uniform thick overcast for an instrument check. Releasing at about 800 feet or so, he did several large circles in the area above the paved runways and eventually cornered some lift and tightened up the turn. There he sat at about 400 feet cranking the ASW-12 round and round, just maintaining his altitude. Shortly, scores of soaring birds which had been sitting out the weather in the trees at the south end of the airfield, flapped over to the center of the runway to join Wil in his thermal. Around he went, neither gaining nor losing for twenty minutes or so until he finally straightened out, did a quickie circuit and landed. Landing the sailplane over a set of wires and coming to a complete stop perhaps less than 400 feet beyond in no wind conditions was just as impressive as the scratching demonstration. It was obvious that the entire flight was performed under a striving state of mind, an exercise in doing one's utmost beginning to end.

There are enough limitations imposed by the laws of physics without the unnecessary limitations which many pilots may impose upon themselves. Remove the burden simply by altering the state of mind with which you fly. In order to achieve, one must strive. Start small and see how it can work for you and how much you will benefit, by flying with the philosophy of the optimist. ❖



# Change the quadrilateral

**Jack Dodds** 1985/5

ARE THE MOST RECENT CHANGES to the Sporting Code an improvement? For decades, the only permissible distance flights were straight, zig-zag, out-and-return, and triangular. Now that 40:1 glide ratios, water ballast, and air data computers are commonplace, it is also deemed necessary by the FAI to add new options to the traditional four. Why?

Under the new rules, a Gold distance can be flown using a close pair of turnpoints 50 km from the airfield and a third turnpoint 50 km on the opposite side. On a day with 6000 foot cloudbases, a pilot in a 40:1 glider could fly a Gold distance without ever leaving gliding range of the take-off point. Similarly, Diamond distance can be flown within gliding range of home as long as a height of 7800 feet can be maintained near the turnpoints [in this case, 83.3 km away]. This is certainly a possibility in the west. I find it difficult to accept such flights as achievements demonstrating pre-eminence in the soaring fraternity.

Furthermore, the rules as now established are arbitrary. For example, only incomplete triangles can qualify for distance. Why not other incomplete courses?

I've got two Diamonds now, and have been looking forward someday to making the exhilarating 500 km leap. Perhaps by that time the new rules will have been repealed. I hope so. ❖

## **Tony Responds:**

*Changes to the Sporting Code are not made without a significant amount of discussion over a period of time by international members to the FAI group (CIVV) charged with soaring standards. It was largely your assumption of perfectly placed turnpoints, which in practice cannot be met in many places around the world, that prompted the recent changes. Many countries have problems of severely restricted airspace, unflyable terrain (mountainous, or intensive agricultural areas), or unsoarable air (near oceans). Japan would be a good example of a nation having all three hindrances to long flights. Some countries can't even fit a 500 km triangle within their borders. The result is that many sailplane pilots have had to travel to other countries to do their advanced badge flying, and this was judged not to be in the best long-term interests of the sport. Even in Canada, many areas suffer some of the restrictions listed above, and a pilot whose club is in those areas can travel distances equivalent to crossing several European borders to reach some soaring Valhalla like Saskatoon.*

*Your example courses are correct and possible: given the assumed cloudbases, your 40:1 glider flown at max L/D at all times, a dead calm day, perfectly placed turnpoints, thermals situated directly over each turnpoint and the airfield exactly when the pilot arrives, and no sink anywhere on course. I don't think that you should be concerned that the Gold and Diamond distance flights are being too seriously watered down. The improbability of all your conditions being met, and of the pilot being ready to go on such a day, would demonstrate the ultimate pre-eminence in good fortune! Also, regardless of the pilot's position relative to the airfield, he would have to make a precise soaring flight of about seven hours for the 500, and that's no mean feat.*

*Lastly, paragraph 5.3 of the Sporting Code does allow distance to be claimed from incomplete triangles, but not other incomplete tasks, and this does seem arbitrary to me. Perhaps our Sporting Committee can follow up on this.* ❖

# the survival of gliding

**Fred Weinholtz** 1986/4

*This long editorial is adapted and condensed from a talk given to the British Gliding Association AGM in 1985. Weinholtz is a leading figure of the German soaring scene, and was the director of the World Contest at Paderborn in 1981. Some of his musings on the state of gliding by 1995 and 2000 are quite prescient. Tony*

IS IT NOT CURIOUS that somebody from the Continent has come to talk to you about the chances of survival of gliding in your country? Moreover, for many of you and also for a lot of glider pilots all over the world, this subject does not even seem worth discussing. Well, gliding has found its followers worldwide. Its problems and its fate surely do not end at any national border, however much its forms of organization may differ from country to country. Gliding clubs in my country and yours are very similar to each other except perhaps for a few national variations. On the other hand, I believe it is really time now to make some observations which could help secure the future of gliding, a sport that seems, on the surface, to only be able to live in an ideal world.

I take for granted we all regard gliding as sport – the most stimulating, most thrilling, and best sport we can imagine. But everywhere in the world there are people, often endowed with a lot of influence, who try to deny gliding the status of sport, at least they try to restrict it, and their number is growing. I speak of airspace authorities, the politicians, the “physical training” sports purist, and even environmentalists in places.

We can face the danger that threatens gliding by these people if we stick together and if we succeed in activating the giant army of our “silent friends” throughout the land. These friends are real. They look at our sport with interest and goodwill without showing themselves. If, one day, we really want them to raise their voices for us, then we must present them with an advantageous picture of gliding and we must avoid making mistakes. In their opinion, gliding must remain the beautiful, fascinating sport – and we must improve its reputation even more if possible. It is exactly around this matter, dear friends, that I am most concerned.

Gliding as a sport is quite young. Not long after World War I it was born on the Wasserkuppe in Germany. After the war, though, powered flight was banned in Germany, everywhere else in the world the developments of the war were used to achieve heroic aeronautical deeds. For example, the British pilots Alcock and Brown flew from Canada to Ireland eight years before Lindbergh, in 1919. This feat was largely unknown because the two taciturn pilots persistently refused all interviews before the flight. The angry press got its revenge by remaining deadly silent ... take this little story as a piece of advice on public relations work.

The first glider pilots had to be all-rounders. Their admittedly very simple gliders were designed, constructed, and repaired – the latter having to be done very often – by the pilots themselves. The gliding enthusiasts learned quickly, and accordingly the instruction became better and better. The cost of gliding was extremely low and the simple material for the gliders could easily be begged. So it happened that particularly impoverished unemployed people and students became the upholders of the idea of gliding. They fulfilled, to a high degree, the demands the new sport made on its followers. They were capable of enthusiasm, they showed courage and toughness, they proved to be flexible in all situations, and they were full of irrepressible optimism.

In those days, the picture of the “typical pilot” was created by a simple-minded public. Even today it occurs in pure unadulterated trash in movies about flying. Behind this picture lay the unquestionable fact that flying, and particularly gliding, has got something “special” that was not realized and is not even realized today by the general public. And this again is one of the reasons – I myself think the main reason – why so many people mistake gliding for an elitist activity.

The sporting development in gliding proceeded world-wide from the 30s to carbon fibre, the admirable performances of the top pilots, and the great training success of the club-based instructional system. But there are now questions. Will the course of gliding continue to get better? Is there a plateau in front of gliding, on which the achieved can be preserved? Has gliding possibly reached its peak and can now only take a downhill path? Or is there even a yawning abyss, into which gliding could plunge? These questions cannot be answered in advance. But we must do our utmost to prevent my following look into the future – intentionally painted black – from coming true.

Let us try to visualize the year 1995 – only ten years from now. The best glide angles will increase to about 40 for the two-seaters and a bit more than 60 for the top quality gliders of the Open class. Ex-works, new gliders will cost between \$40,000 and \$150,000. Of course, gliding itself will be more expensive than today. It is a rule of thumb

that a glider "in normal use" costs its owner per year approximately 20% of its value. Everything is included in this 20%, from hull insurance to launching charges, from instrument repairs to transport by road, from amortization to BGA membership. If you cannot believe me, just ask your club treasurer to divide the yearly club expenses by the number of your gliders and you will be astonished at the result. And, if you divide the yearly cost of the gliders by the number of hours they have flown, you will arrive at approximately \$50 on average in the BGA. This is the price of one gliding hour in spite of all the honorary work that is done in the clubs. And if the development continues as in the last 30 years, the value of one gliding hour will be about \$80 in ten years time. On no account will the development of general income be able to compensate, I suppose.

Thus, the number of active glider pilots will have greatly decreased in 1995 because of the high costs. We all know enthusiastic pilots who have thrown in the towel because they cannot afford their sport any more. But other figures too should provide cause for reflection. If we follow statistical calculations, we must expect a decrease of nearly 20% in the number of youths up to 18 years of age in the next decade. On the other hand, the number of pensioners will increase by about 15% over the same period of time. This will have a considerable influence on the income rates, and this development will automatically have a strong effect on the membership structure of sports in general and in particular on that of gliding.

Today, the average age of members is rising in all the gliding associations in the western world. When I try to imagine a gliding site in the year 1995, I must paint a horror picture. The precious gliders are seldom in the air. Only a few incredibly rich youngsters, enabled by father's wallet or by a fortunate inheritance to carry out their elitist snobbish sport, wait for thermals. A group of outdated pilot, whiskey glasses in their hands, sit in the clubhouse dreaming and talking of better times in the past. Let us hope that this will never come true. But as crazy and exaggerated as all this may sound to you, gliding is in danger of becoming a leisure activity for only a small number of privileged people, and so lose its present high reputation as a sport.

We must try to find at least a few answers to the question: "What can we ourselves do to secure the survival of gliding as a popular and attractive sport in the next century?" First, we must establish a model that we can follow. This model must be fixed and clear, but flexible too, because the unpredictable influence of the future will certainly compel us to react and, therefore, adapt to the situation. I myself visualize sound gliding in the year 2000 as follows, and I hope you will share my opinion, at least in the essential features:

- The man in the street must be able to afford gliding. One flying hour must not cost a club member more than his net income for two working hours with all extras included.
- We must see that the number of glider pilots compared with today does not decrease but possibly increases.
- Gliding must arouse public attention and be regarded as the great sport that it is.

If these three basic goals are fulfilled, we should have not too much cause for concern about the future of gliding.

Let me say a few words about the national associations now. I must admit that, as a West German, I sometimes glance a bit enviously at the opportunities and activities of your association. But the national associations in general must be on their guard against the danger of a centralistic spoon-feeding of the sport, because they are not an end in themselves but are merely the sum of the interests and the dedication of their members. Thus, I see the main task of a national association is taking care of its clubs. For example:

- Working as partners with the state and the national airspace authorities in order to make work in the clubs possible and to promote them.
- Integrating the different spheres of interests such as top class sport, competitive sport, popular and recreational sport, instruction, and general club life.
- Having responsibility for the quality of the sport and therefore for safety of gliding in clubs and among individual pilot by training first class all-round instructors and setting up optimal guidelines for instruction.
- Offering interesting and challenging contests on all levels.
- The interest in gliding of all classes of society must be kept alive and stimulated by sensible public relations.
- Last but not least, it is one of the most important tasks of our national associations to keep up a permanent discussion through which the experiences and the interests of the clubs are brought together into one channel. In this way, an informed opinion and a jointly and resolutely represented view can be guaranteed.

All this will only prove to be successful, if the clubs share their thoughts and collaborate with their associations, and if they are willing to participate uncompromisingly in majority decisions, even if these decisions are contrary to their own opinion. Without the clubs, nothing would go on in gliding in the western world. If there were no clubs, the number of glider pilots all over the world would certainly never be about 150,000 but about 20,000 at the most, if gliding existed at all.

Clubs are the basis of our sport – at least in Europe north of the Alps, and therefore for more than half of the world's glider pilots. If clubs are sound, gliding is sound too. They have the most promising opportunities to create the prerequisites for gliding to secure its future. They are all in a position to offer to those interested in gliding that which is good value, top quality, and fascinating at the same time. Clubs manage gliding and preserve and promote its idea, and are the native soil of our sport.

Let us talk about the clubs now, their duties and their possibilities. Firstly, there are the costs, which must be decreased or at least preserved for a long time. To achieve this, our gliders must spend more hours in the air. The average yearly flying time in your clubs is rather low at 83 hours per glider, although you had good gliding conditions during the last season. I am well aware of the fact that club-owned gliders average about 50% more flying time than privately owned ones. We will work on the assumption that your club gliders fly about 100 hours a year. This value – equivalent to the one of the German Aero Club – is exact enough for our purpose.

Returning to the figures I quoted before, it costs a club about \$5000 to operate a glider. If we subtract the launching fees of approximately \$1000 that still leaves \$4000 fixed costs on the glider, or \$40 per flying hour. But if we could succeed in doubling the flying time per glider, we halve the hourly operating cost. I think there is a large saving, especially for the member who (according to your statistics) averages 14 hours a year – \$280 should be quite a lot of money to a glider pilot. Although most club committee members are real magicians when it comes to keeping the costs for their clubmates low, the first principle must be “*more flying*”. There are many opportunities for the clubs to meet this demand:

- Well-organized flying operations must be offered regularly, even if the weather does not look very promising in the morning. Prerequisites for this are a sufficiently large group of beginners (they are always eager to fly), enough devoted and persistent gliding instructors, and a loyal core of experienced pilots.
- Gliding in clubs must be great fun for the members. Rules should promote gliding and not hinder it. Having visited a lot of gliding fields in the world, I have met a great number of super gliding fellows; but a revision of the rules and regulations concerning “fun” would have done some clubs a world of good.
- For every glider pilot it is a challenge to fly for a change from another airfield over an unfamiliar area. The clubs should arrange gliding holidays for their members. A year ago for instance, I met the military club “Bannerdown” at Aosta in the Italian Alps. What these fellows flew there during their short stay was really heart-refreshing and – I am sure – not performed by some clubs in the course of a whole year.
- The flying time charges must be limited reasonably. “No charges after the third – or maybe the fourth – hour of a flight” is a tried and tested rule. It supports cross-country and weekdays flying and moreover, it encourages the pilots to attempt longer distance on slow days too. The income from three hours of flying time is far more than if the glider had been left in the hangar.
- Club members should always have the opportunity to fly on weekdays.

An average of 200 flying hours per year per glider can be easily achieved if intelligent rules are made and followed, and if the club and its members are full of good intentions. A lot of money can be saved by clubs that pursue clever equipment policies. I think it is absolutely wrong if a club provides instruction gliders only, and leaves it up to its members to join a syndicate of glider owners after they have got their C Badge.

It is also of great importance for the club to buy gliders that fulfil their intended purpose. Many take the view that only the glider type that won the last World Championships can be the right one for them, regardless of what it costs. What nonsense. A good second-hand glider of the preceding generation will do. The club can save about \$10,000 on the purchase price and another \$1000 or more a year on comprehensive insurance. And does anybody really believe it would be a disaster if the top pilot of the club stayed in the air ten minutes longer to complete his 500 triangle?

My next subject is the winch. Even in France with its long tradition of aerotowing, more and more clubs are switching over to winch launches. Aerotows are simply too expensive nowadays. One only has to look at the rise in price of a towplane. A kind of framework – blueprints and general construction directions – could be provided by the BGA, so that the clubs do not have to reinvent all the details. A truck chassis and a 200 to 300 horsepower engine from a crashed car should be easy to obtain as gifts. Only a few parts that the club members cannot produce themselves must be bought. Under these circumstances a winch launch can cover its costs for one or two dollars. A 1500 foot release altitude at this price is certainly an alternative compared with the cost of an aerotow. Winches need not be bought. Most of the many winches in Germany are self-made by the clubs.

All gliding clubs have a wide range of opportunities available with which to satisfy their members. A wise club policy is indispensable. It can achieve a lot regarding social club life, member's rights at club meetings and especially

flying operations. As mentioned before, it is my opinion that a club should provide gliders for all its members according to their capabilities. We, in Germany, do so on principle. I know very well that many British clubs take another view. Just because of this, I invite you to follow my idea of good care of club members with regard to flying.

In Germany, youth may take up gliding and fly solo as soon as they are fourteen. The teenagers learn quickly and fly skilfully and safely. In addition to this, as they are growing out of their childhood, young people seek a purpose in life and look for aims and objectives for the future. Very often they desire something “special”, something out of the ordinary, which they could, to a large extent, find in gliding. Naturally, there is a considerable number of young people who only spend a few years gliding before they leave us for many different reasons such as their careers, studies, marriage, and so on. We should not be angry about this occurrence. Some of them will return later anyhow. Others may hold respectable positions in society, and if they look back on their gliding time with pleasure, they will be only too willing to help us if they get an opportunity.

The instruction of beginners in the clubs must be of prime quality. Let the young people experience the fascination of our sport. Let them become a little bit addicted to it. Consequently, longer and enjoyable thermal flights belong to instruction from the beginning. We must be careful not to overtax the student, but our beginners must be faced with a challenge, they must be set tasks. It is not the time they are airborne that is important, it is the way in which they spend this time. The words of George Moffat, “One minute in the air without making a decision is a lost minute”, should apply even to beginners. Show your young clubmates that you have confidence in them. It is a common bad habit to base the requirements for flying new and better types of glider solely on flying hours or even on the length of club membership. Ask yourselves who really deserves more help and encouragement. Is it the pilot who has barely flown the necessary hours over a span of many years? Or is it the youngster who has shown great skill in a relatively short but successful career?

Lastly, let me say a few words about the extremely important public relations work in the clubs. I mean PR in the broadest sense, going far beyond pure press work. Unfortunately, it is fairly underdeveloped in the gliding world.

Right at the beginning, something very fundamental. I can only suspect the reasons, but for the last 20 years I have been able to make out a worldwide tendency toward exaggerated modesty in gliding. Everywhere glider pilots present their sport – if at all – as “absolutely normal”, as “nothing unusual”. I am sure we are not doing ourselves a favour in being modest to such a degree. We should say – loudly and clearly – that gliding is definitely something special, in what it demands of us and above all, in what it gives us. I am sure the public would appreciate it ... remember what I said before concerning the picture of the “typical pilot”.

It may sound curious to you, but accident prevention and air safety are effective means of good PR work. They substantially influence our reputation. But when an accident happens, we must not evade the reporters. We must give them clear and correct information, and let them know what dangers can be hidden in gliding if carelessness, lack of discipline, or even bad luck occur. Honesty always pays off in the end.

Contented members are excellent PR. They talk enthusiastically to their families, among friends and at work about everything we do and achieve an excellent effect.

Active cooperation in local politics and in local and regional sports associations is of great importance for our reputation. However, I know quite well that gliding folk prefer to stay among themselves, if only because their sport is so different. But we should try to force ourselves to mix with other people. The contacts and the relationships which we can establish on local and regional levels will sometime and somehow bear fruit.

We must be careful not to develop our gliding sites into impregnable fortresses. They must be welcoming to visitors, so that those interested – and there are many of them – can come to the launch area on safe paths. There we get them as near as possible to the scene and talk to them. We will make additional friends, and we can never have enough of them. Also, it should be a truism that our airfields must be pleasing to our family members.

I hope I have been able to make my thoughts clear: the most important task of public relations work in gliding is to increase our already large army of “silent friends”, to inform them, and to increasingly win their favour for everything we do. One day we may need them to support us in our fight for survival. More friends mean more approval, more young gliding members, more support and more power. All are basic requirements for achieving our aim.

This was only a small part of the enormous range of possibilities we have got to use to secure the future of our sport. However, I have also tried to point out that glider pilots everywhere have got the same problems, but also the same chances to do something about them. The future of our sport is not certain if we let things slide. We must do something positive ourselves, be well prepared, be dynamic. I conclude with the slightly modified words of Johannes Eulerling, the top sports official of North Rhine Westfalia in Germany: *“The future of gliding is far too important to entrust it merely to the future”*. ❖



# Bringing back the magic

*Advice for the disheartened pilot.*

**Paul Brice** 1987/3

WHERE HAS ALL THE MAGIC GONE? This is a question that many pilots ask themselves a while after gaining their Silver C, for part of the gliding magic is the sense of achievement after hurdling each test or badge. The sort of day required to complete a Silver distance, duration or height appears quite regularly during the spring and summer at most sites. Pilots with sufficient spare time and money, adequate training and certain amount of “go” often achieve their Silver C within a year of going solo.

The first solo, Bronze and Silver C all represent numerous tangible achievements, each one spurring the pilot on to the next. But after the Silver, the badge awards become considerably more difficult and sometimes more expensive to get. The flat site pilot will often have to travel hundreds of miles in the hope of finding wave to gain Gold and Diamond heights and the 300 km and 500 km badge flights normally require much better than average days. Consequently, the badges – and as a result the apparent achievements – are less frequent and the pilot becomes disheartened.

Ask your club pundits about their most satisfying cross-country flights of the season. After the one or two obvious ones on cracking days, reflection might lead them to mention a flight possibly inconspicuous by its actual distance (100 km maybe) but highly satisfying because *they had made the most of what was offered*. A 100 km or 200 km which produces no badge can be far more meritorious in certain conditions than a 300 km romp in ideal conditions. And certainly the elation of crossing the finish line after a 100 km completed is far greater than that of sitting in a field after 120 of a failed 300 km. Good cross-country flying comes from a sense of purpose, practice, and the right mental attitude.

There is a great tendency amongst pilots waiting for their Gold distance to waffle around within twenty miles of home and then saunter back claiming they have gone around places they could see in the distance and which they never declared beforehand. This achieves nothing. First, the 300 km Diamond is a declared flight and secondly it requires photographic and barographic evidence. I know many pilots (including myself) who have had bitter experiences of losing badge claims and contest days on bad TP photography or poorly set-up barographs. It all needs thought and practice.

Setting the right task for the day is another problem, so practise it. Get help at first – often it pays to ask the pundits what they’re doing. If it’s a 750 km day, then you might consider a 300 or 500 km attempt! If they’re trying to do a smallish task very fast, then declare it yourself – they’ll mark some thermals and with luck you may be able to follow for a while (avoid doing this in competition or badge flights because it’s only unsporting and irritating for the leader). Even if it takes all day, make a proper start, stagger around, go through the turnpoint photo sectors (take pictures, if possible, to examine afterwards) and make a safe final glide. Don’t let the desire to get around reduce your acceptable safety standards. If you have the opportunity to fly a high performance glider, get help in declaring a suitable task. Crosswind legs in a light wooden glider can be soul-destroying and impracticable in a strong breeze.

However impressive it may sound, getting away from 300 feet is more often the result of a tactical mistake or poor airmanship than supreme competence. Generally, the lower you get, the weaker the thermals become and the fewer your options, so don’t glide too fast because you’ll come down much quicker. Look at the sky. Fly where the lift is even if it is a little off track. Avoid obvious areas of sink. Be prepared to change gear with varying conditions and if it all goes to worms, fly anywhere to stay up.

And when you land out time after time, ask yourself why. Look at the barograph trace, examine the photographs. Ask for advice. In the end perseverance will bring results, if slowly. Feel your sense of achievement and the return of the magic – even if you land out. If you are content with your gliding – whatever form it takes – then be grateful for the magic. This article is not a dig at non-cross-country pilots. It is an attempt to encourage those who think gliding has lost some of its charm to get out and feel the great sense of achievement from cross-country flying. Don’t worry about badges. They’ll come in good time. ❖

# Some welcome direction for soaring

– ending 10 years of stagnation –

**Tony Burton** 1988/3

YOU WILL FIND IN THIS ISSUE of *free flight* three articles that have a major emphasis on the future direction of soaring, something this sport is in desperate need of. Action on the substance of these articles can get soaring off dead centre where it has languished for years. We fly technically wonderful machines, the epitome of the aerodynamic art and the designer/engineer's skills. But because the CIVV, which regulates this sport, lost control of the Standard Class not long after the now-venerable Ka6 began flying, today everyone must own Porsches because there are no Chevy contests; and this has been the curse of the sport for two generations of glider pilots.

Lacking a tight definition on configuration, sailplane development focused on L/D and speed in a positive feedback cycle that has been slowed only by the limits of the strength of materials, and more importantly by the inability of most pilots to now afford the results. Furthermore, reaching any consensus on solutions has been hampered by a mind set, developed of necessity in the serious competition pilot (and highly contagious) which, simply stated, is "*equipment performance is everything*". The pity is that the pilot who is looking for a place on an international team has had no choice but to operate on this principle – the world's cleverest ASW-15 pilot is unlikely to prevail over the journeyman Discus driver. Let me give you a test: you see a photo of the winner of the world Nimbus-3 championships and the world I-26 championships. Now be honest, whose shoes do you wish you were in, and in which contest would you rather have competed? Right!

Sailboaters, our two-dimensional equals, don't think this way. Sailing is largely "*skill is everything*". The great range of sailboat classes is a major factor. The 12-metre yachts get great press, but competitors pay their respects to sailing skill – and greater respect is accorded the crew of the smaller boats – especially in the ocean races. I want to remind club pilots who think our narrow competition class structure doesn't affect them to consider that roughly 75% of the single seat gliders flying in Canada today were designed for the specific purpose of winning World or national contests (if you don't count twenty-two I-26s, the figure is 85%).

Finally, the troubles in our sport have become so pressing that a subcommittee of heavyweight international soaring pilots were tasked to examine the problems and make recommendations to this March's annual meeting of the CIVV (see the article, "*A Major Review of the World Gliding Scene and World Championships*"). The subcommittee's findings place a great deal of emphasis on expanding the tiny performance box we have got ourselves into, and a competition is being established to design a glider somewhere between the hang glider and the current 15 metre span ships (in a way reinventing the original Standard Class). Having this small glider in world competition is necessary to guarantee a wide market for manufacturers, and it will have extensive beneficial "ripple" effects on all aspects of the sport, especially down at the club level. Also, more emphasis is being directed to a wider range of competition tasks to elicit a greater range of piloting skills than is possible while racing around preset triangular courses.

There has been some adverse comment from the competition fraternity. This is to be expected of course – all current contest pilots have grown up within the existing system and are good at what they do under the present rules, flying the hottest ships, so some will resist change. For example, our AGM competition workshop produced phrases like "the drawback of lower performance" (meaning speed), and "turning back the clock"... This reaction reminds me of the words of the old WWI-era song, "How do you keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paree?" As long as every pilot can get to the next thermal and use all his skills to win the day, it's a contest. *Whether it's at 75 or 120 km/h is absolutely irrelevant.* The winners were honoured in the 60s flying the Austria no less than they are now. I expect aerodynamicists and engineers will welcome the challenge of re-exploring a corner of the low speed flight envelope that hasn't been exploited seriously (except by homebuilders perhaps) for over forty years. Given current technology and materials, let's see what pops up. The performance-is-all mindset must and, I believe, will be broken within the next few years as a result of the current hard examination of the function of world competition in our sport. ❖

# *a Curmudgeon's view*

## – examining some sacred cows

**R. Salter** 1994/1

THERE ARE SOME WIDELY HELD OPINIONS in our sport which have achieved almost sacred cow stature. They need examining, and above all, rethinking in the light of the unpalatable facts.

One item that comes to mind readily is the concern about the lack of young people, and the belief that gliding will wither away unless this is remedied. Undoubtedly it would be great to have our clubs full of youngsters but the sad fact is that they lack the disposable income required to go flying. Unless dad pays or unless they belong to the air cadets or a similar organization, they are for all practical purposes precluded from taking part.

The matter does not rest there either. Once they join the workforce and then marry, they have their noses to the grindstone for the next fifteen years or so, getting established, raising a family, and battling with the mortgage. Not until they are in their thirties will they surface and breathe a little easier. Our potential market is therefore the age group from about thirty-five upwards, whether we like it or not. Anybody involved in marketing will tell you that you need to ascertain the demographic section of interest to you, and that your product determines that. Trying to sell to a non-existing market is a waste of effort. You only need to look around our clubs to see the truth of this. Sad it might be, but our recruits join us at a mature age.

Another proposition often heard maintains that everything would be all right, if we only returned to basics. Now “basic” means different things to different people. Some of us long for the good old days when there was no “bureaucracy” for regulations, forgetting that things are no longer what they were then. They also forget the numerous accidents of that time. Others decry the cost of modern sailplanes, and want to go back to wooden aircraft with more moderate spans, believing that this would significantly reduce the cost of flying and thereby attract more people. This matter of costs is pretty doubtful. Unless you build the aircraft yourself, you would contend with today's labour costs and overheads. Just check out what a K-13 sells for now!

In any case, people quite clearly prefer to buy expensive craft for performance. There is a decided tendency towards motorgliders, in spite of the high costs. Just look at the import figures, if you want to establish where peoples' preferences lie.

Another idea currently being pushed is that if we only turned towards competition flying or advanced cross-country work, the loss of members will stop and all would be well. This stirred vague feelings of guilt in me as I happen to be an unrepentant recreational pilot. My pleasure is to fly some 300 kilometres or so on a day. Whether this takes a quarter hour more or less is of no interest to me at all. In fact, if the landscape underneath is attractive, I am just as likely to circle there for a while to admire it. Am I contributing to the decline of the gliding movement, while the racing fraternity is its salvation?

Now I have no desire to put down in any way those pilots who have the competitive urge. They are quite entitled to pursue their interests, and I concede readily that they fly more efficiently than I do. But are they the answer to our problems? Crunching some numbers reveals that less than a quarter of Australian glider pilots take part in any competition whatsoever, and that includes even the smallest local meets. As you go up the scale of prowess, the numbers thin out rapidly of course. At the highest level, competition pilots are totally absorbed in their activities, and they also have to fork out a lot of money. There are honourable exceptions, but as a rule, the top pilot is of little use to his club, apart from prestige.

The club scene quite clearly depends on the recreational pilot and the ab-initio student for its survival ... (hence this is where useful effort can and should be concentrated). ❖



# Rebutting the Curmudgeon

The mediocre may pay the monthly bills now, but it is the best who keep soaring's soul alive.  
(a forceful response to the editorial by R.Salter)

**David Peppiatt** 1994/3

THE CURMUDGEON RATTLES ON about marketing soaring to the universal mediocrity of early middle-aged, lower middle income earners, presuming that those who have never demonstrated a talent for achieving above average success in their general lives will begin to do so the moment they step into their first glider. Bull! I have no wish to vilify the input of mainstream Mr. Average, without him no economy and few soaring clubs would survive. However, relying upon mediocrity as a basis for stability and growth of any enterprise invites inevitable decay. My use of the term 'mediocrity' is not used to derogate the value of the casual recreational pilot but to clearly separate me from the Ingo Renners of the world who are ten times the pilot I am.

All persons who take up soaring are seeking challenges, risk, and thrills. Local soaring provides that for a period but as the challenge ebbs so does the enthusiasm and interest – not of all but of many, as has been amply demonstrated by the constant reference to the declining numbers and membership turnover in our sport. As one becomes more competent at soaring the number of risks diminish congruent with the pilot's ability to learn to handle those risks, normally from his own mistakes. Interest level is maintained by maintaining the risk level, and that is done by extending the horizons of the initial challenge of flying by cross-country competition.

The survival of soaring worldwide relies upon attracting highly motivated success-oriented competition pilots, those who wish to go ever further and ever faster. They want the best of everything and because their success attracts sponsorship they can afford the best (at least such is the case in Europe), consequently sailplane builders are forced to improve their product. And who is the main beneficiary of those advances? Yep, your average weekend recreational pilot. You can bet that the curmudgeon, wearing his mediocrity like a badge of honour, isn't flying a Rhönsperber or Minimoa – he will be flying a machine which was designed expressly for those who he believes are of little more value to any club than prestige.

I have noticed that we seem to spend vast amounts of energy trying to convince all who will listen that soaring is actually very safe. Rubbish! It is potentially a very dangerous pastime, which is one of its major attractions and can provide us with a steady influx of risk-starved, success-oriented, youthful high flyers. It is the potential for death and destruction which encourages the public to trot out to car races and enjoy the vicarious titillation of sailing at 30 knots plus in Southern Ocean gales, albeit from the TV chair. Soaring can never be absolutely safe, what a bore it would be if it were. It is this element of risk which, if marketed correctly, will prove to be the drawing card we so dearly need to bring money and people into our sport.

Technology is radically changing the nature of work, and traditional work is being supplanted by work that cannot be done by a machine. An obvious example of that is sport, which even today is a massive worldwide employer. The money which changes hands in the USA football, baseball, and basketball scene is probably greater than New Zealand's GNP. The vast amounts of cash which competitive yachting attracts is quite incredible when one considers that 15 years ago it was deemed to be as interesting to non-yachtsmen as watching grass grow – until we won the America Cup and the public had a new breed of hero. Sport can do nothing else but grow, but those that will attract the most money will be those that are marketed best which means selling the public on the idea that a particular sport is of vital interest to them. We can do the same as yachting provided we think outside the square. This will take time and a plan, including the identification and marketing of soaring heroes through regular competitions in all classes, by giving the sport more visual appeal for TV (GPS technology can do the same for us as it did for yachting coverage), and by exploiting the risk inherent in flying. Getting TV interested will get more media coverage, with that will come increased public interest, and from that will come increased sponsorship and money. It all starts with competition and the ones who will gain the most are the clubs and the recreational pilot.

I do not presume to either encourage or coerce any recreational pilot to change his ways to take up the cudgel and compete. His right to float around within gliding distance of the field or on a comfortable cross-country is sovereign. I acknowledge that for the most part the recreational pilot is often the stalwart who fixes, organizes, sits on committees, and undertakes the host of tasks required to run a functional club. But in order for the sport to fly, to be vigorous and healthy and to grow, it needs both body and soul. The body comprises all you decent folk who are not interested in competition, while the soul is the Ray Lynseys and all the other competition pilots who accept no boundary to their soaring horizons. ❖

# Firing up the troops

the pilot must take some responsibility too

This editorial is a re-think of the one that I wrote for the 1982/1 issue, “Get off your Butts” that opened this section on page 6.

**Tony Burton** 1992/2

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN a matter of some club concern and hand wringing when seemingly keen members of two or three years standing drop out of the sport for no apparent reason. There have been past suggestions in this space and elsewhere that these “new” pilots have become bored with local flying at the post-solo stage of their progress, probably because progress has ceased. *It's incumbent on your club, dammit, to keep pilot enthusiasm up by providing an encouraging level of post-solo training, and to do nothing that will hinder their ability to progress in their soaring skills.* That was the message, right? However, in preparing a talk for a very successful pre-season soaring seminar at my club last month, I remembered that enthusiasm cannot be handed to someone on a plate, it comes from within. True, a club shouldn't be placing impediments in the way of the pilot, but this pilot has a personal responsibility for becoming bored, too! This is the more ‘right wing’ attitude of taking charge of your own destiny and not expecting someone else to do it for you. (Pardon the pun – I guess the club's duty is politically the left wing in this case, and two are usually required.)

Right, it is you that is going to do great things this season – but only if you have set a GOAL for yourself and are prepared for the day before it arrives. The felicity of setting a goal is that it keeps you focused on what you have chosen to be important. Your experience level is irrelevant. Set an ambitious goal that exceeds your grasp – what's the furthest you think you could possibly fly this June – now add 50%! Glass or I-26, the glider is irrelevant. Goals you can reach are Micky Mouse – be the ‘Man of La Mancha’ and dream the impossible dream. If I may define an adventure as a trip whose outcome is uncertain, then fly adventurously often.

Being physically prepared for the flight can gain you fifty kilometres at the start of the day – being mentally prepared can gain you a whole lot more at the end. When you're out on course stay alert to the world around you and always be telling yourself that you're wasting time in this crappy thermal. The really Wow! flights happen when all your fine flying skills have put you 150 kilometres away from home at 6 pm and, Glory of Glories, you find that the day lasts and lasts and the lift diminishes but you float across the airfield about the time the hangar doors are being closed. You're beat, but nothing can match your feeling of accomplishment on a day like that – it's better than sex! You will never, ever have that feeling if you don't consider the possibility of trying the impossible. My very best flights have occurred on days when I planned an ambitious task and then someone suggested an outrageous one.

I've thrown out some big numbers here to make a point to everyone that has done a cross-country, but impossible goals are perhaps even more important for all you brand new pilots that still have a shiny C badge and a shiny new licence. Don't be intimidated by your club pundits – grill them mercilessly for their tips and tricks, then team up with the other newbies and plan an assault on the club Silver distance milk run.

My goal this year? Five 500's! What's yours? ❖

# the Zen of editing

**Tony Burton** 1999/5

SOME TIME AGO, a comment came my way that perhaps the number of reprints appearing in *free flight* might be reduced if the editor gathered several issues worth of back-up articles and material to fill blank pages as they arose. Leaving aside the point that my main use of “borrowed” articles is to compliment the content mix, not just top it up, the practicalities of building such a treasure trove (the actual jargon term is “slush pile”) clearly had not been considered by anyone who had tried editing even a club newsletter.

This thought moved to the front of my mind again about two weeks before the deadline of this issue. At that time I had little except the promise of a world contest article, the Mud Bowl story, and a few smaller reports. Not exactly panic time yet, but it looked like it was going to be a skimpy 20 page issue.

Then what almost always seems to happen, happened. Barrie Jeffery e-mailed to ask if I might want him to send me a book report on Sir George Cayley and the first glider. Is the Pope Catholic, etc!? Then Art Grant sent me his harrowing tale of an almost-accident. Then Charles Yeates e-mailed me to say how much he had enjoyed the World Class contest in Poland ...

The zen of editing kicked in ...



Let's see ... arm-twist Charlie; not for a “blow-by-blow” story, but for a sense of the feel of a one class competition – the story is excellent and well complemented by Kris' experiences as crew. In a Calgary library I found a picture out of a 19th century magazine which illustrated Barrie's review nicely. A paper by Fred Weinholz on the marketing of the PW-5 (or the lack thereof) was in the Australian magazine and that was a good tie-in with the World Class story. Jim McCollum phoned to suggest that “Soaring Stuff” go in this issue for your Christmas gift buying – two more pages filled. *SOARING* magazine had an intriguing article on the design requirements for ultralight gliders to soar continuously in “microlift” conditions. I contacted the author for further clarifying text, and this technical material further points the way towards where many of us may go in the 2000s. Now, what to do for the editorial page? Earl Menefee presents his thoughts about why we all bother with this sport or why I'm bothering to do *free flight*. Perfect – now some odds and ends to fill “Hangar Flying”, and then make the whole mess look pretty and error-free.

Then on the deadline day, what should appear on my e-mail but a complete analysis of Art's almost-accident by his club's safety officer, a report from the CAS cross-country clinic, and a valuable safety culture discussion from Ian Oldaker. So, out goes the ultralight sailplane design article (it will be in the next issue), another planned accident analysis, and the club address list in order to stay within twenty-eight pages, and this small diary of events got long enough to be promoted to an editorial in its own right.

Voilà! From despair to one of the better issues you will read, all in about ten days. Of course, by now you will probably appreciate that living on the edge like this is nervous making. If you want to see a *free flight* with lots of local colour, remember that you enjoy reading someone's story because they wrote it for you – do the same for them – and give me fair warning too! And you thought being an editor was dull ... ❖

# ...on the claim that gliding is more dangerous than driving ...

Notes from *rec.aviation.soaring*, 2005/2

I'D SAY THE CHANCES of a pilot getting killed or injured are not so much a function of experience, or its lack, but more on how conscious he is of his own limitations (and that of his aircraft), and how close to his personal limits he is prepared to fly. Which is why so many seven-hour-a-year pilots survive and a few national champions haven't. It's certainly interesting to watch the reaction to ugly facts. They are dismissed as: "don't apply to me" or "Lies, damn lies and statistics" or, "Doesn't matter, you'll die in bed anyway." Actually, the last one is one I agree with. The fact is, over a 20 year flying career you're about thirty times more likely to die of some other cause. If it's worth the risk, be careful and proceed. If it's not, stop. There, that wasn't a tough decision, was it?

Dismissing the risk for other reasons may be strictly illogical, but arguably it makes a kind of sense. You're highly unlikely to die in a glider, so why make yourself miserable about it? Especially if (and it's a big if, but it's possibly right) all the worrying in the world won't much change the outcome. Best to just tell yourself warm fuzzy things and trust to dumb luck (the "when it's your time, it's your time" philosophy). It's an approach, and I can't argue that it's wrong. Certainly all the preaching seems to have reduced fatality rates little or not at all ...

For those of us, however, who like to think that we can keep the worrying under control while trying to ensure that we don't spend the last moments of our lives thinking, "well, *that* was dumb..." there's further interesting insight to be had from those published statistics: student pilots have disproportionately few accidents; private pilots are about average; commercially-rated pilots have far higher accident rates; and Air Transport Pilots have significantly fewer accidents than private pilots although slightly more than students.

What does that mean? Here's the thing: flying more provides improved skill and judgement, and therefore less risk per hour; but it also increases the total exposure to risk (total hours). At first, increasing the amount of flying you do will increase your exposure faster than it decreases your hourly risk through improved piloting (for the first several hundred hours at least). Eventually, the higher skill level will compensate and get your overall level back down to where it was when you were a student (and either flew with an instructor or very carefully in really good conditions). What do I take away from this? I think it means that as I get more comfortable and confident in my flying, that's the time to keep my vigilance high. Other interpretations may differ.

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STATISTICS ARE VERY USEFUL when applied to populations. They approach worthless when applied to an individual. The concept of your chances of dying flying gliders being 38 times that of driving cars is basically worthless to you. Your insurance company wants to know that, because they will insure (or not) your cohort... and they can make dollars and cents decisions based on that 38 times item.

You? When you get in that glider ... or that car ... you are either going to die or not. And, let's face it, you, me, most of the folks we know do not die when they do it. Bruno Gantenbrink, in his article on gliding safety, was saying that he knew a lot more people who died in glider accidents than who died in cars. I am sure he does, and my sincere condolences to every one of his losses. I am an anesthesiologist and I work in a (relatively) big city hospital. I have seen more people die of gunshot wounds than any other cause in the last two weeks (been a bad couple of weeks). Does that mean that the people of this town are more likely to die in a gunfight than in a car? Not at all – it just means my view of things are skewed, just as the fellow who recounts all of the glider pilots he knows who died. His circle of friends are glider pilots. He also included a few of the greats who died recently. That is a skewed view.

So, what's my point? Well, bottom line, soaring is a risky endeavour. If you do it casually, if you don't satisfy certain minimum requirements, you have a reasonable chance of dying. If you do it with care, if you set reasonable personal limits, if you do all of those things that we all talk about ... you are going to have fun and prosper. If you don't soar, you have an excellent chance of not dying while soaring. I, as a doctor, guarantee that you are gonna die. From something. And if you don't soar, is that really living? Not to me. ❖

## Part 2

*This is no way to  
run the place!*

# The death of enthusiasm

**Tony Burton** 1985/4

EARLY IN MY GLIDING CAREER I got the post-solo “blahs” – bored stiff driving a I-26 around the sky over the Gatineau Gliding Club. I made a conscious decision to abandon the I-26 for good and fly the club K7 (I found it difficult to coordinate – but needed the challenge to keep an edge on my enthusiasm for gliding. The greatest boost to my early soaring experience came when the CFI took me on a 90 km cross-country flight to MSC and back. I’ll always remember that first feeling of being away from home, of being part of an adventure, while having the psychological and practical benefit of an expert behind me, telling me to go faster, or get me re-centred in a square thermal. My greatest early soaring disappointment came in failing to finish my first long cross-country flight because no “expert” had told me about final glides, and that it was possible to glide 40 km back to an airfield you can’t see, it’s so far away. As a result, though I had an easy glide home, I landed 10 km short by wandering around looking for that one last evening thermal – being told during the evening “post-mortem” that I could have got back really hurt!

One cannot stand still in most human endeavours, and this is certainly true of the sport of soaring. If you are not actively progressing, you are decaying, by whatever standard you set for yourself. Is it a fact of club life that the pilots who stagnate after attaining their licence inevitably drop out of the sport. The club racks up one more soul to its sad membership turnover statistics, and all the volunteer effort of the instructors has gone for naught. Obviously, it is not in a club’s best interest for this to happen. One of the main areas where many of the clubs fall down is in having no *active* post-licence program of training for the new pilots. Let’s look at one of them for a moment:

- This pilot has only proven to the CFI’s satisfaction that he can take-off, glide down through the air with some control, and demonstrate sufficient circuit judgement to land the trainer without incident.
- It is entirely possible that he has not experienced a good thermal climb in training. This pilot knows little or nothing about soaring (which is after all, what this sport is all about) but is in the full flush of a personal triumph – there is still a certain mystique to piloting an aircraft in these blasé times.
- This pilot will now discover that he has been almost abandoned by the club training system and must pick up on soaring more or less on his own. Maybe he can and maybe he can’t.
- This pilot will find he has almost no *objective* club standards against which to compare his flying, he will not be particularly encouraged to excel, and will fly a single-seater with such a lousy vario he could never tell if his thermaling is luck or skill anyway.
- This pilot’s enthusiasm will deaden and he will quit in about one more year.

Apart from the old regular, the absolutely hottest candidate for long term club membership is our post-solo student in that flush of success. What simple, positive things can a club do to keep that person hooked on soaring?

- Start by keeping the attitude right, telling him that the new skills are only the *beginning* of soaring training. Publish a long list of specific intermediate and advanced gliding and soaring techniques, procedures and skills that the pilot will be given every opportunity to practise and demonstrate in subsequent flights. Allow the pilot to proceed at his own pace, but monitor and actively support this continuing progress.
- Ensure that the club solo ships have decent, working, well-compensated variometers in them complete with speed ring. How else is the pilot to practise efficient flying or know if he is progressing in his soaring abilities?
- Give the pilot dual cross-country flights. It only has to be 1-2 hours long and be about 20-30 km away, but it has the enormous value of literally broadening his horizons, of being the first “safe” experience of soaring out of sight of home, of showing thermals exist out there, and of wonderfully concentrating one’s attention on soaring skills, and of going somewhere besides up and down like a yo-yo.
- Try the positive feedback inherent in the team approach to progress, with a small group of 3-4 pilots sharing early soaring training experiences, competitions like spot landings, organizing local flights or club events, sharing crewing between them for the 50 km, keeping the trailer ready, etc.

Does your club have a few solo pilots who don’t show up at the field much any more? You better find out exactly why. If it’s because they are bored with flying, it says much more about the club operation than their state of mind! A growing program of post-solo training has positive effects which will ripple throughout the club: increased “perceived value”, a *lowered* workload for instructors, and safer pilots. Don’t let enthusiasm die. ❖

# Let's get serious!

**Al Schreiter** 1985/5

RECENT ISSUES HAVE CARRIED articles and comments to the effect that the sport of soaring is getting too expensive, and that in order to attract new members, clubs and the SAC must find means to lower the costs of membership. No one has made any specific, workable suggestions how this is to be accomplished, or even defined "too expensive." This is akin to saying that in order to avoid death one has to live longer... someone else can work out the details.

*Let's get serious.* Most of the real costs of soaring are beyond our control. We have little influence over the price of either new or used equipment. The operating costs of towplanes are determined by outside forces. Taxes are beyond influence. If we want to soar, we have to pay for it – I can't believe money has anything to do with membership. Let's not spend much time worrying about the few potential members who are deterred by cost. Instead, let's concentrate on attracting just a few hundred of the tens of thousands who can afford our sport.

First, let's stop talking about how badly we need new members and then wait for someone else to produce them. How many clubs have a written a three-year plan to raise their membership to a specific number by the end of a specific time period? Does your club executive know how many new members the club wants, or can absorb? Does everyone in your club know? Do they care? A surprising number of clubs do not have a real commitment to growth. They like being a small group of around 20 – they just don't like the attendant costs of being small.

Unless your club has a well-defined, reasoned-out specific membership goal, approved by the majority of the present members, how does it expect to get this majority to cooperate in a realistic effort to achieve this goal? Do you know what a potential member should look like, and where he/she can be found? If you don't know that, how do you expect to recognize one? Have you examined how new members are absorbed into your club? Is there a proper introduction of new members or information for them? Do new members know what is expected of them, or what the club "no-nos" are?

Have you examined your equipment lately? How exciting is it for a new member to look forward to hanging around over the field in an 18-year-old, more than slightly battered glider for the rest of his "soaring" career? Better equipment costs money, but it also helps attract and keep members. Are your present members committed enough to soaring to go out on a limb and finance better equipment?

Once you've decided that you want new members and how many you are looking for, not just this year but for at least the next three years, what do you do about it? You make a continuous effort on several fronts:

First, get to know the sports and recreation editors of your local papers. Invite them to the field and offer them an introductory flight (don't charge for it). Give them some written informational material about soaring and about your club. If you don't have any, make some – they like pre-chewed material. Keep in touch with them. Every time something exciting happens at your club such as badge flights, record attempts, or new equipment, feed the information to them in writing.

Second, use every available chance to display your equipment, especially during the winter when it's not being used anyway. Shopping malls, sports shows, and conventions are always looking for additional show pieces. But when you display it, make sure it's in presentable shape.

Thirdly, get into the local high schools and service clubs, bring some of your best slides and put on a half-hour presentation about soaring and your club. Service clubs are usually desperate for guest speakers, and most of their members are well-heeled enough to be able to afford soaring.

And so on and so on. Use your own imagination. The object is to make as many people as possible aware of the fact (not just once a year, but continuously) that a soaring opportunity is available in your neighbourhood. Until you reach your defined membership goal, the effort must be perpetual. And lastly, don't apologize for the cost. Compared to many other sports it's still very reasonable. Lots of people are quite willing to pay for something that is as much fun, as rewarding, and as thrilling as soaring. Let them know how they, too, can participate. Your club and soaring in Canada will be the healthier for it. ❖



# Welcome to the club – tiny horror stories!

**Gary Chapple** 1989/6

I JUST DON'T BELIEVE THIS! Here I am, a SAC member for only a few months, and already I'm getting into the fray. But then Gordon Bruce did broach the subject in the 4/89 issue of *free flight* ... Perhaps a little background is appropriate here. Although I have only been a SAC member for a little while, I have been a power pilot for over 30 years. I've been a glider pilot for a decade and a towpilot for almost as long. So what took me so long to become a member? That's what I'm writing about. Now if you should recognize yourself in what follows it is quite unintentional, but I do want to illustrate my point. So I promise that if you don't tell, I never will.

Gordon stated that generally our clubs are doing well except for the recruitment of new members. I can fully understand his concern and perhaps by relating my experiences, and that of a friend, I can shed a little light on at least a couple reasons why our clubs aren't growing. I am far from an expert in this field, but I have had some difficulties getting to join a gliding club. And if I hadn't got the Mile Zero Cadet Soaring Association going in Dawson Creek, BC, I might not have joined yet.

For a period of time after I got my glider pilot licence, I wasn't near any clubs. That wasn't a problem though because I was involved with an Air Cadet squadron that had its own glider, so I didn't need to join a club. Then I moved to an area where there was no glider. But there were two clubs nearby. I say nearby because any enthusiastic soaring buff will happily drive a hundred miles (160 kilometres for you Old Country types) or so to go flying. So what was the problem?

Let me tell you about the first group. I drove over to their place with a group of Air Cadets. The cadet glider was there and the club's towplane was used (for which they were paid, by the way). Because I was with the cadets, the club members would not talk to me. My friend was more insistent than I was and he got to talk to someone who said he would give him a ride in the Blanik, but only if he was interested in joining the club. Well, that was fine because that is precisely why my friend had come. He also wanted a membership for his son. Before he got to use his membership he overheard another club member remark that he should not have been sold a membership. "If they want to glide, let them start their own club. We don't get enough time here ourselves." Neither my friend nor I ever went back. That club folded. It has now started up again but is struggling for members.

Undaunted, I tried the other club. Boy, was I made welcome. I was given a free flight which consisted of a tow to 2000 feet, two tight loops, a dive towards the ground with a pull-up, a right turn and descent to a landing. Good thing I was too inexperienced to be scared. Then came the shocker. Initial one-time membership fee was \$3000 dollars plus an annual dues of \$200. Then there would be the maintenance assessment at the end of the year. Smokin' thermals – I didn't want to buy their sailplane, I just wanted to fly it! By the way, that club has folded too.

I was recently at a club where a course was being held. The first day I arrived I asked about the course and was told that no one was around. Then it was suggested that I try the clubhouse. There I was told that I should try the field. I point out that after I got to know some of these people, I really felt at home. Then I visited another club. The first person I met had been on the course I just mentioned and he introduced me to every member on the field. I had a great time and certainly felt most welcome. But at the same time a young gal who had just graduated from an Air Cadet course showed up with money to fly and wanting to join the club. No one seemed able to tell her how to join and it took over an hour and a half before someone showed enough interest to take her flying. I trust she was able to enrol, but I had to leave before I could find out.

I would hate to think I wrote all this, which must look like I'm unloading after a visit to the psychiatrist, without having a point in mind and some positive suggestions. We, as club members, usually join a club to go soaring and to be in the company of like-minded people. But for the health of our clubs we need to be actively seeking new members. Many times they will seek us out, and because of our own indifference or plain lack of understanding, they go away never to return. So what can we do? Here are some ideas:



- If your club doesn't have a membership chairman and committee, get one.
- Educate every member in the club on the need for new members. Explain that the more there are the less the individual costs. There may indeed be more people wanting to fly the club plane, but it may mean more planes.
- Have a pamphlet (can be just a photocopied sheet) available to explain the particulars of joining your club complete with contacts and phone numbers of the membership committee. Follow up and make sure that all the members know where they are. Never let a visitor leave without one. Perhaps they may not join but they could give the pamphlet to someone who will.
- Make sure that every member is aware of the need to be friendly to visitors on the field. Take the time to explain what is happening. Show them the sailplanes and if possible get them to take an introductory ride. Don't send them to find someone or some place on the field – TAKE THEM! Make them feel like they are welcome. Glider pilots have proven to be the most friendly bunch with each other. Now let's spread it about.

Think about that young cadet who was left standing there, MONEY IN HAND, wanting to join. If my wife hadn't been there to talk to her she may have left. Think about how you would feel if that cadet had been you. Then act accordingly.

I think this would be a good time to consider the Cadet gliding program. Every summer they graduate some 200 or more glider pilots. As an instructor in that program and a SAC member as well, I see some shortcomings in the way these young people are trained, BUT THEY DO TURN OUT 200 PLUS PILOTS EVERY YEAR. Some go back home to areas where there are no gliding clubs. All of them go home keen, eager to get into the air and to learn to thermal or fly ridge lift. They have heard vaguely about the Diamond badge and want to go after some of these badges. Money is limited but if they are encouraged and a desire is built, they will get what is needed. It would be ludicrous to think we can recruit all 200. But if we were to create a "Cadet Membership" or just actively approach local squadrons we could certainly get 50 of them. With further instruction they will become fine soaring club members and foster an interest among their friends.

For now this is enough. I will say that for the most part I have been well-treated whenever I have visited a club, particularly in the past months. I see a need for us to encourage club growth, to support our provincial organizations and to support SAC. And I have just scratched the surface on ways or ideas for recruiting. If your club has found an idea that really worked for you why not write free flight and tell us about it. ❖

## **Yes, you do have to buy it! — Brian Hollington responds 1990/1**

Gary Chapple, while making several useful points about membership, shows an unfortunate ignorance of what it takes to get a gliding club started and keep it going – money. *"I didn't want to buy their sailplane. I just wanted to fly it."* If we could take members on that basis, I am sure that every club in Canada would have a waiting list! As he found out when he went to a club with lower membership initial fee, those who paid for the equipment resented those who joined "just to fly it." The capital to start a club has to come from somewhere and it is not unreasonable to expect new members to pay a part of that cost. Nor is the answer to be found in increased membership alone. Consider the following example:

One of my colleagues at work expressed a strong interest in gliding. Since he was stinking rich and qualified to fly power up to bizjet level, he seemed a suitable, even a desirable candidate. So I offered him a flight the following Saturday and received a rather surprising reply: "Very well. I shall be there about noon. I should like the flight to be over by two as we are having people in for drinks." I assured him that I could get us a high spot on the list since I was instructing and would be at the club at 8 am; I also assured him that if we took off at noon we would be down by 12:30 as lift at Hope does not usually kick in until about 1 pm.

He felt that he could not devote his valuable spare time to anything so "vague" and told me that if the sport were ever to amount to anything, we would have to "get it better organized than that." I can honestly say that his absence has caused the VSA no harm whatsoever. My only regret is that I shall never see him struggling with a Blanik wing root ... ❖

## What is SAC doing? Tony Burton 1992/3

*Letters to the Editor are generally pretty sparse, but every few years all hell breaks loose, usually, as here, on some national organizational matter. The response to Al Schreiter may seem like overkill, but the only way to answer the questions and allegations is with factual detail. However, using free flight to correct someone's misunderstanding about how to do their income taxes and bookkeeping (on another letter from Dixon More) does not seem to me to be good use of the available space when a well-placed phone call or letter should have done the trick.*

*Why do members feel it necessary to write such letters to free flight at all? The essence of the problem seems to be that from time to time SAC is seen by some as an unresponsive and impersonal bureaucracy like the government – that personal contact is not possible between members in this quite small association – so concerns must be aired in as public a forum as possible. Perhaps the perception is natural amongst a population of pilots who just want to go flying and see even club organization and duty lists as vaguely onerous; what does surprise me is that the current letters come from old “insiders” in the sport.*

*Regularly, one reads that SAC is a free association of volunteers working for our common goal, which is soaring in as hassle-free, safe, and enjoyable way as possible – the “you are SAC” phrase. But it seems that this truism sort of fades away occasionally and a sense of detachment grows which is neither in the individual member's or the group's long term interest. There is no question that the Board must be responsive to question, there is also no question that the people on the Board (and the committees) deserve honest dialogue.*

*Everyone who does the behind-the-scenes grunt work must extract some personal value in this hidden labour and occasional positive feedback of some kind or will say, “what's the point?” This go-round has cost each writer a lot of unnecessary homework, time, and psychic credit when I'm sure they could have been doing much more interesting things with their lives.*

## Quo Vadis, SAC? Al Schreiter 1992/3

The 1991 SAC AGM took place with little discussion and with great speed. Neither the Board of Directors nor the member clubs had proposed any motions in advance except the routine approval of the budget, the now routine proposal to increase the fees and the approval of actions of the Board during the past year. I was amazed. One can draw only two possible conclusions from this. Either all the clubs and their members are perfectly happy with SAC's status quo, or they just don't care and don't want to be bothered. Conversations with quite a few people across the country lead me to believe that it's the latter rather than the former. Let me propose a few subjects for discussion:

**Financial statements** The SAC Financial Statements for 1991 were not made available to the clubs until the morning of the annual meeting. Club voting delegates had no opportunity to study the financial statements, yet were asked almost immediately to approve it and the budget based on it. I was the only delegate who questioned this unusual procedure and objected to it. No one on the Board gave a satisfactory explanation why the financial reports were not circulated to the clubs well in advance of the annual meeting. Since the date of the meeting was public knowledge for the prior 12 months there is simply no reasonable excuse for this procedure. Doesn't anyone care why and how the membership's money is spent?

**1992 SAC fees** The Board proposed a fee increase of \$3 per member. No particular reason was given except that it was only a small increase, and it was to cover “inflation”. The fact that the 1990 dues had produced a surplus of approximately \$11,000 was ignored. I seemed to be the only club delegate who questioned this and proposed to vote against the increase. The next time anyone complains about the SAC dues, please remember that your club voted to increase them even though there was no real budget proposal to justify the increase. These “small” increases have boosted SAC fees from about \$50 to \$85 in the last few years, with the result that the Board could place embarrassing surpluses of over \$60,000 into the Pioneer Trust fund in the last three years. Doesn't anyone care why and how the membership's money is spent?

**Pioneer Trust fund** The basic idea of the Pioneer Trust fund is excellent, and I am all for encouraging people to make voluntary contributions to this fund. But do you realize that the Board of Directors over the

past few years have made it a practice to put any SAC surplus into the Pioneer Trust fund? In other words we have all made contributions to the Pioneer Trust fund without having any choice about it. No small sums, either. Over \$60,000 just in the last three years. Because of the way the fund is set up, SAC cannot withdraw capital from it for any reason. While this is right and proper for the fund, it makes it an unwise business decision to put all surpluses into the fund, instead of keeping at least some of it available to SAC for a "rainy day". When I moved that in future the Board should propose the disposition of any annual surplus to the membership at the AGM, and have the disposition voted on by the club delegates, the motion lost by a wide margin. Doesn't anyone care why or how the membership's money is spent?

**Allocation of SAC funds** Perhaps we should take a closer look at how the SAC money is allocated. In 1991, 48% of all expenses covered administration, ie. salaries, rents, phone, postage, etc. Meetings and travel took up 16%, *free flight* another 16%. Only 5% of expenses were allocated to Flight Training & Safety, and only 1-1/2% to publicity. Is it right that administrative costs eat up about half of the total revenue, when the "product" gets only 6-1/2%? Now that the insurance administration has been returned to the insurance company, and the membership and accounting records have been computerized, is the Ottawa office still a full-time job? Can more cost effectiveness be achieved by more sharing with the Aero Club? Would a greater allocation of funds to Flight Training & Safety perhaps produce substantial future savings in insurance costs? Does anyone care how or why the membership's money is spent?

**Free flight** I have no doubt that the majority of the membership wants, and will pay for, periodic information about soaring in Canada, club news, club chit chat, technical information etc. But is it necessary to produce a glossy magazine of the highest print quality, or could the basic purpose be achieved by simple desktop publishing and the cheapest method of reproduction? The five print runs produced in 1991 cost over \$21,000, or about \$3.25 per copy. A standard newsletter could probably be produced for half of that. Has anyone investigated the idea of producing a publication for the Aero Club of Canada, along the lines of the German *Aerokurier*? I understand the combined membership of the Aero Club is approximately 25,000. That should attract enough advertising to make a combined publication self-supporting. Does anyone care what we could do with the extra \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year if *free flight* were self-supporting?

These are just a few of the SAC budget items which deserve closer consideration. Surely other people have other ideas to propose for discussion. Do we expect the Board of Directors to operate in a vacuum? Do we just "do what we have always done"? Why does a growing number of members think that the SAC membership is a waste of money? I think it's high time for each of us to give serious thought to what we think SAC should be and do, and to communicate with our directors, so that the SAC of the future will be a stronger and growing organization.

### **Alan Sunley (SAC President) responds**

I welcome the opportunity to reply to Al Schreiter's letter, "Quo Vadis, SAC?" I believe Al has made some valid suggestions and comments in his letter and hope some improvements to SAC's operation and input from other members are the result. I will take the subjects in order:

**Financial statements** It would certainly be of value if we could get the financial statements circulated to the clubs well in advance to the AGM, but do not consider that public knowledge of the date for the prior 12 months has any bearing on the issue. The problem is that there is just over two months of time available from when the books are closed at the end of December until the date of the AGM. For the clubs to receive the information in time for any reasonable study and discussion on it would cut the available time to at most five weeks, in which time the office staff (one person) would have to finalize the accounts, the Treasurer examine the statement, the auditor to come in and examine the books and prepare his statement, and have the printing of the total financial report ready to be mailed. That's a tall order when other work also has to be accomplished. I wish we could do it.

**1992 SAC fees** The \$3 increase in fees was explained in the Treasurer's report under 1992 budget. It was proposed to offset lower revenues in other areas, namely investment income and sales, as the Board considered that interest rates could be considerably lower in 1992. By the way SAC fees have been over \$50 for the last ten years. I don't know where Al got his sum of over \$60,000 surplus in the last three years. The surplus in

1989 was \$23,241, in 1990 – \$15,163 and in 1991 – \$11,944 for a total of \$50,348. None of these surpluses were budgeted. In 1989 and 1991 they were due to cancellations of the October directors' meetings and cancellation of an issue of *free flight* due to an appearance in August of a severe reduction in expected income, and because the Board did not believe in creating deficits. There would not have been a surplus in either year if the Board had continued on with budgeted expenses. They did not consider it prudent to do so. As hindsight shows – and is being capitalized on – it was a definite error on the conservative side. The surplus in 1990 was due to a cancellation of two years of insurance payables which the insurance company declared we did not owe.

**Pioneer Trust fund** I agree with Al, the idea of the Pioneer Trust fund is excellent. We need it to cushion the vagaries of income from membership fees and investment income. It needs to be built up to allow this. If Al had checked the financial statements for the last three years, he would have noted that SAC has kept about \$60,000 in term deposits in the general account available for a "rainy day". I also consider it a good suggestion for the Board to bring up for discussion at the AGM the disbursement of any significant surplus and their recommendations for such. I only hope it would not develop into an all-day debate as each delegate and member gave his views on how it should be accomplished.

**SAC revenue allocation** I disagree with the "implied" definition of "product". Why is *free flight* eliminated from the "product"? Is it not of as much value, if not more value, to the membership as publicity? Is not postage and some of the phone costs part of the "product" in communicating with the members? Is not the cost of printing part of our "product"? Are not the costs of travel, phone calls, postage, meetings etc. of our committee chairmen, members and directors part of our "product" in obtaining better insurance rates, working with DoT to obtain type approval of imported sailplanes, trying to clear up the conflict of use on our radio frequency, clarifying rules and procedures for contest pilots and cross-country enthusiasts, registering badge and record claims?

Al, I agree entirely with your last two paragraphs. More thought, communication and proposals are necessary. However, for most members that takes away time, time with their families, from business, and from other recreations. And it comes down to the "bottom line", is it worth it? I believe it is.

#### **the editor responds:**

Perhaps I can contribute a few basic facts about producing *free flight*. Besides my impression that our members do not want a magazine of lower quality than they are getting, it would not be any cheaper to produce in some newsletter style anyway. The current printing industry technology is page imaging to plate direct from a computer disk of the layout. It is cheaper and faster for the printer than the old system, and glossy paper is not much more expensive than bond to print on and gives much better picture quality. Getting the magazine onto disk is achieved right here in my office by exactly the "simple" desktop publishing technology that Al suggests – which is why the layout cost to SAC has decreased in the last three years after commercial phototypesetting was eliminated.

Taking *free flight* ad revenues into account, each issue cost about \$3860 to get into your hands in 1991 and \$4140 in 1990. However, it is actually cheaper than that because the cost of the *Soaring Stuff* sales flyer is included (which should be a sales expense), and the 12-page AGM report in the second issue is a large cost administrative expense (\$1723 in 1991) but saves money over the prior system of printing and mailing individually bound copies of the reports to all members. I understand that these expense items will be separated in future financial statements. Lastly, regardless of the magazine's format, it still costs about \$1200 an issue to mail.

The concept of a national aeroclub magazine has been successful in some European countries where a large market exists for a full-blown commercial colour publication. I don't think such a magazine would be viable in Canada, and if publication expenses came out of membership fees, the opportunity Al sees still isn't there. In any case, if the content of such a magazine were even loosely tied to the membership numbers of the contributing associations, it would be 80% full of model airplanes! ❖

# Have you flown a Ford lately?

**Tony Burton** 1993/2

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME a shiny new single-seater showed up at your club, or even in your province? The big German glider “werks” have almost without exception been designing and selling sailplanes for a very exclusive clientele of either rich pilots with ambitions to win the next national, European, and World contest, or for the more recent niche of motorglider pilots who don’t mind laying out the extra Marks for an obscenely expensive small engine as a means of doing their own thing in relative privacy. Of course, German labour costs being what they are, it is simple good economics for them to build the BMWs of the soaring world, especially as it takes just as many manhours to lay up one of those as a “Ford”. (This was the major reason no German manufacturer took up the challenge of designing a sailplane for the World class competition.) In the long term though, those profits might dry up as the customer base shrinks away. There are hundreds of hang glider and paraglider pilots out there worldwide who might otherwise be in sailplanes but for the cost.

One would think that the emerging strength of the Eastern European makers would bring the prices down. That isn’t happening at the present because, with no low-priced competition, they are pricing their sailplanes to just under what the market will bear to pull in the hard dollars. Maybe it’s because their production capacity is limited now, but I believe it’s a mistake. For example, the new Blanik L-23 is selling for about US\$29,800 delivered, which isn’t outrageous, but still makes clubs carefully check their wallets. Given the labour costs in the Czech Republic, I think if LET knocked about \$5-6000 off, they would have so many more orders they could easily make up their profits on volume.

Anyway, with the supply of reasonably priced sailplanes in desperate straits, it would appear that other manufacturers are finally discovering that there is a market out there! I attended the SSA convention in Seattle and was heartened by the lower-cost performance that seems to be developing now.

Peter Masak is progressing well on his “Scimitar” 15m class sailplane. He fully expects to finish the prototype of the 50:1 or better racing machine before this summer is out and which he hopes to sell for under US\$40,000. An hour-long lecture by Peter on the design of the new wing, the materials, and the highly experienced technical support he has received, gave the interested crowd a lot of confidence that his claims are not wishful thinking. While definitely not a Ford, “performance-per-dollar” will be taking a giant leap downwards.

Of more interest to the ordinary cross-country pilot is the new composite Standard Class sailplane kit, the “American Spirit”. It’s flying, and a complete and a partly-finished ship was on display. It’s an attractive ship and appears to be reasonably straightforward to assemble with a good construction manual and earnest company support. With an L/D in the low 40s and priced about US\$19,000, it is capable of almost any flight most cross-country pilots could attempt at a very decent price.

Soon the World class glider winner and a few equivalents will be offering safe, easy to fly ships with L/Ds in the low 30s, suitable for badge and fun flying for delivered prices in the US\$20,000 range (cheaper of course as a kit). The “Cygnet” was on display, the American World class entry that just ran out of preparation time for the prototype fly-off last October in Germany. The design concept of this pretty little ship is innovative, and with a bit more work, a production kit model is possible.

I hope that this surge of effort will result in a lot more pilots staying with the sport. Soaring has needed a Ford and it finally looks like one can be in your trailer soon. ❖

**Postscript** (2008): *The Scimitar never went into production – there is a huge cost gulf between building a prototype and manufacturing. The American Spirit started to do well in homebuilt sales until one broke due to what was found to be an under-designed spar shear web, then builders ran away from it.*



# A concern for the future of Canadian soaring

**Ed Hollestelle** 1993/1

I CURRENTLY HAVE SOME GREAT CONCERNS about the future and advancement of gliding and more particularly, soaring in Canada. Regrettably, our sport doesn't seem to be growing at all and it seems that we have come to a point where membership is decreasing and fewer people show up at our provincial and national competitions. Most technical advancement derives from top level sports events. The latest engine/transmission/suspension/tire technology is found at the world's renowned car racetracks. It is the constant advancement at that highly competitive level that filters down and changes the cars on our roads. In gliding the situation is similar. It is at World Championships where improved equipment and better flying techniques become evident.

I think it is vital to the survival of our sport of soaring in Canada to participate actively at a world level. I know we have found ourselves in a "Catch-22" situation but if we do nothing about it now I think we might be in worse trouble than ever before. The fact that soaring is not a visible sport makes it difficult to find corporate sponsors. And because Canadian pilots have not done so well lately at the Worlds it becomes even more difficult to acquire any funding. At the time I write this it looks like Canada will not have a team participate at the World Gliding Championship in Sweden in 1993 because there is no money in the SAC world team fund. If we do not start raising money now there will be no funds for a world team to go to New Zealand in 1995. (This will be even more expensive.) If the top Canadian glider pilots are having difficulties in ranking well at world level competition now I would hate to see the scoring results in 1997 if we do not participate and improve our techniques and skills for the next five years. If Canada does not have the funds to send a team to represent the country, it becomes obvious that this will halt the advancement of soaring in many ways:

- The Canadian Nationals will no longer serve their purpose. Promising up-and-coming new contest pilots will not devote their time, efforts and money to drive wherever in Canada to participate in this event, because even if they win and "make the team" they go nowhere.
- Provincials, which quite often serve as a stepping stone for the new competitor or warm up for the experienced, will no longer have any meaning.
- There will be no new competition pilots going back to their respective clubs dying to share their newly-learned skills with the other club members.
- Nobody will bring in the latest types of gliders and go through lengthy Type Approval procedures. Consequently their current gliders will not become available as "affordable" used gliders and so on ...

Behind these thoughts lies the importance of a "Canadian World Soaring Team" and why I think the CASG should try to help with the funding. I wish you good health and hopefully a better soaring season in 1993! ❖

**Jim Oke responds** 1993/5

## Club flying versus competition lifestyles

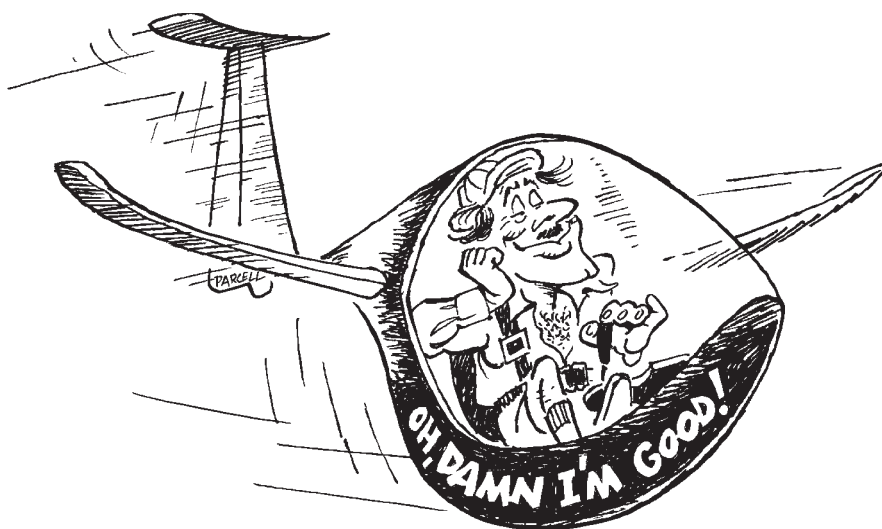
*often they neither impress nor support each other*

THIS LETTER WAS PROMPTED by the editorial in the Canadian Advanced Soaring Association newsletter by Ed Hollestelle which discussed the problems of getting more support and funding for the Canadian Team and competition in general. First of all, concern over the future of soaring is hardly restricted to competition and cross-country glider pilots, to SAC, or even to Canada. I think every club in the country has looked with alarm at its membership numbers and sought ways and means of drawing in more members. My own club has tried the whole gamut of devices such as shopping mall displays, open house information meetings, TV appearances and advertising, airshow participation, low cost introductory packages, and so on to try to generate public interest and membership.

In my view, getting people to take up soaring is like getting people to vote NDP. There seems to be a core constituency that will come on board fairly readily and remain loyal but expanding beyond this core group is quite difficult and may only draw in temporary supporters who drift off at the first opportunity. Worse, an intensive

membership drive can drain so much time, money, and energy away from other club activities to even become harmful to a club. At some point, reality has to be faced and a gliding organization's size and operating philosophy tailored to the core audience that is really there; in other words, we should make sure that we are doing a good job serving our existing members and guard against putting too much effort into membership expansion schemes of questionable value.

With regard to world contest participation, I think you must be aware that you are preaching to the converted within the CASG membership/readership. The question might more properly be asked as, "What can be done to improve world contest support amongst Canadian glider pilots at large?" Clearly, unless we can get our fellow glider pilots firmly on side, CASG (or whomever) is going to have a tough time going after SAC, government, sports bodies, or sponsor money for World contest purposes. In this connection, I think we have all seen signs that contest pilots do not come off very well in the eyes of most club pilots. It is my experience that many club pilots consider contests as more of a nuisance than anything else; perhaps all they see is that a club towplane disappears for a few weeks at peak season, or maybe a bunch of strangers invade their club (again at peak season) and the usual 2-33 flying is disrupted. That sort of thing. This, "who needs a contest" attitude may be as much the problem in finding contest sites over the past few years as any other factor. In other words, club executives may be simply reacting to their members' wishes in refusing to consider hosting a contest.



A few years back I attempted to promote the idea that a host club ought to have something tangible to show for their efforts in hosting a contest (a new outhouse, base radio station, map board, or whatever) to provide an incentive for club members to become involved in contest organization. Probably not a bad idea but it would have cost a few bucks extra on the entry fee, the size of which is a hot item with contest pilots – besides, the move towards austere, multi-club organized contests also works to defeat this idea.

The noticeable lack of support for contests in general and World teams in particular is clearly a sad state of affairs, but why have things got this way? To start with, there is a basic attitude problem that I have seen at numerous clubs. Essentially, most clubs are so geared to ab-initio training and have such restrictive local flying practises that cross-country is often the last thing that club pilots are permitted to think of. The incestuous nature of most Canadian clubs allows this mindset to continue through generations of instructors and club executives. We have all seen the symptoms such as harsh punishments handed out to anyone careless enough to land out in a 2-33, club gliders bent when scraping back to the airfield after overflying perfectly landable fields because the pilot was "afraid" to land out, refusal of the club to risk club aircraft on cross-country expeditions, and so on. I agree that there are some enlightened clubs around where cross-country is genuinely encouraged, but these are the exception.

For this reason, I feel any attempt to promote World Contest participation using an "improve the breed" sort of argument will fail unless the case is made quite carefully. Yes, you and I know this to be an excellent reason to support a World team, but the average club pilot not being much exposed to cross-country flying in the first place will see little personal connection with Canada missing the Worlds. Some drastic change in the status

of cross-country flying would be necessary, such as introducing a Silver badge requirement to gain a glider pilot licence as the Germans have. Recalling the howls that result whenever the present very minimal licensing requirements are adjusted, I doubt that such a change will happen soon.

Another non-starter is a World contest surcharge on the annual SAC membership fee. The BGA does this with (as I recall) some thing like £2.50 of each member's dues going to World contest support. Assuming each SAC member made a (tax deductible) contribution of \$10 to the World Contest fund, this would raise about \$28,000 every two years which would be a reasonable start on fielding a team. Although this is equivalent to a few beers or a 1000 foot aerotow at most clubs, I feel the possibility of such a motion ever being passed at a SAC AGM is effectively zero due largely to the average club pilot's perception of the relevance of world contest participation to him or herself. Approaching a commercial sponsor for support when even such minimal support from one's fellow glider pilot as described above is non-existent seems unrealistic.

Regrettably, past world team members have not helped matters much with post-event publicity. For instance, I recall a SAC AGM several years ago where the after-dinner entertainment was a World team pilot giving a slide show of his experiences at the Worlds. Unfortunately most of the presentation was a nice tour of beaches and foreign sights and places with not much on the contest itself. Yes, of course, the guy was far too busy during the contest to be taking photos but I fear the impression to the attending average SAC member was of a nice vacation with some gliding thrown in. "Wonderful, that's just what I would love to do myself, but why should I put up my money so "Charlie" can go on another nice gliding trip again," was a general after-talk perception. This is terribly unfair because I know that Charlie put up most of the money himself and I know how much energy is required to fly in a world contest. However, in any kind of fund raising, whether it be for a glider contest or to feed the starving in the third world, perception is everything.

World contest publicity definitely requires more attention than it has got in the past. For instance, how about a pre-departure photo to appear in *free flight* of the team in neat team clothing with some notable (politician, aeroclub president, hopefully a sponsor someday) in front of a glider trailer? The British Gliding Association always manages to do this with a shot of the boys with Prince Phillip or some Royal in front of a palace. Hard to do and everyone will be crying, no time, no money, etc. but this is the sort of thing that needs to get done. How about a post-event brochure in the form of a contest report with decent colour pictures to go to everyone who donated to or supported the team? How about a photo signed by the team pilots "with thanks" to go to contributors over X dollars? Any corporate sponsor should get a large framed photo suitable for display in the company lobby. This is, I know, the last thing on one's mind during the contest or when looking at all the bills afterwards but again this is the sort of basic legwork that needs to be done for effective fund-raising.

You mention the need for sponsorship but I wonder how well we really looked after our last one, Bacardi. Yes, I know Bacardi wanted a lot from the national contest organizers and didn't put up a lot of cash in return, but they were a bona fide sponsor who needed to be cultivated carefully if only in hopes of someone else noticing us and wanting to pick us up post-Bacardi. Unfortunately some contest pilots and organizers considered the Bacardi more of a nuisance than anything else and often said so which is hardly the way to set the stage for bigger and better sponsors. Recognition along the lines of the paragraph above is also important. I recall that Molson was a one-shot of the 1980 or so Nationals – what were their results from the event? What could have been done to increase Molson's "bang-for-the-buck" quotient? The BGA usually seems able to line up a sponsor for their team but I don't recall too many repeat sponsors, so perhaps they are in much the same boat. The SSA, in the land of the Los Angeles corporate sponsor Olympics, seems to be sponsorless more often than not, so perhaps it is even less realistic to expect a Canadian sponsor to come forward with our lesser exposure, etc.

Finally, here is my idea for fund-raising. How about a big ticket lottery for a sailplane or similar prize? This is perhaps a blatant appeal to greed but these things are regularly run in Winnipeg for quite expensive houses and seem to be sold out more often than not. I am suggesting something like 300 tickets at \$500 each to draw for an LS-6 or similar ship with runner-up prizes such as a car and/or some item of glider equipment. The idea could be that the ship is first flown in the Worlds by a team pilot and then handed over to the lucky winner. The economics would run some thing like \$150,000 from ticket sales against prizes of \$80-\$100,000 netting \$50,000 plus. This may be too long a shot because 300 tickets is over 20% of the 1400 SAC members who complain heavily about \$10 fee increases. (Cross-border sales to American pilots?) Perhaps the idea bears some thought, although it is too late for Sweden this summer. ❖



# *Society has changed – gliding hasn't*

**Louise Armitage** 1994/1

CONCERN WITH THE CONTINUAL DECLINING TREND in gliding membership over the past years has been shared by many associations, clubs, and individuals. Indeed, just from my own personal involvement in gliding, particularly in the area of marketing and promotions, I can remember considerable concern about declining membership being expressed as far back as the mid-1980s. Despite the membership problem being recognized for some time, it seems that little has been done on a broad scale to resolve it. This is not to say that individual clubs or State associations have not been successful in their efforts to secure membership and publicity for their clubs. A number have and through the efforts of their members, do it well.

The gliding movement as a whole has not been very effective in resolving the membership problem and has appeared to be at a loss to find a solution. Fragmented, inconsistent efforts, based more on “shot in the dark” approaches and guesswork have characterized our efforts to build a strong and ideally long term membership base. However, what we tend to do is to concentrate on applying a perceived solution to fix the problem without firstly fully understanding the causes and nature of it. It's a bit like a doctor giving you a Band-Aid for profuse bleeding without looking for what's causing the blood loss. Therefore, instead of looking at specific case studies or marketing strategies which we could use to increase membership, I want to consider some of the likely causes of the problem – strategies can wait.

I believe there is not one key “problem” which can be identified as the problem in declining membership. The problem is an interplay of many complex and often interrelated factors. I would say that the primary factors we need to consider before we even think about specific membership increasing strategies include:

- changes in society
- changing society attitudes to leisure and customer service
- increase in the range of leisure activities available
- how gliding is perceived by our potential market
- costs, particularly in a recessionary economic climate
- diverse nature of individual gliding clubs
- the competition a volunteer based organization has in an increasingly ‘professional’ environment
- lack of marketing knowledge, expertise and funds available to clubs and associations.

This is a considerable list, but a vitally important one. For the purpose of this article, I wish to consider the first four, which I consider very fundamental, but in the case of gliding, seemingly ignored.

**Society has changed ... gliding hasn't** We probably have all noticed that society has changed rapidly in the past 20–30 years and continues to change rapidly. Our own lives are constantly changing in response. As a consequence, peoples' attitudes to leisure and patterns of leisure have altered considerably. The range and diversity of leisure activities have also changed and increased dramatically even over the past decade.

Has the nature of how we conduct gliding operations changed to respond to this? I think that it would be safe to say that generally, the answer is “no”. Considerable research into peoples' lifestyles, leisure and travel attitudes has been done in recent years and I believe that the findings of this research have important implications for the gliding movement. Very briefly, what this research consistently shows is:

- Many people are looking for a variety of experiences without necessarily being committed for the long term. Once they have reached a certain level in one activity, say going solo in a glider, they want to try something else. They will keep moving from activity to activity, experience to experience.
- People generally have less time to commit to travel and leisure activities. Tourism has experienced this pattern for some time now, with people turning away from long holidays to shorter breaks for two to three days. People want to undertake leisure activities that do not require considerable and unnecessary time commitment. Due to the many demands on peoples' time, leisure/travel time also must be efficiently structured and spent.

- Leisure/travel activities must offer quality, value for money and good customer service. People are becoming more discerning and are increasingly demanding a better standard of attention and service irrespective of whether they are dealing with a professional business or a volunteer organization.
- People are becoming increasingly interested in environmentally friendly and 'adventure-style' experiences such as canoeing, gliding or bushwacking. That's good news for gliding.
- We live in an "instant" society. People now expect and are accustomed to having their needs delivered quickly whether it be instant food, instant entertainment, instant access to information or even instant access to leisure.

Can we look at our respective clubs and identify, right now, how we are responding to these changes? In the main, gliding clubs are still operating as they have done for the past twenty years, or perhaps even longer. We still demand that people commit a full day or even a weekend to the club. From the potential member's perspective, we still have clumsy, time-consuming systems of training, not in terms of quality, but in terms of time required. People are now far less willing to work hard all day for one training flight at the end of it. And how about on-field facilities and comfort? Standing around on a hot dry, shadeless airfield in midsummer is not really conducive to persuading people to stay with the sport.

I have heard some gliding people express the view that that's the way gliding is and if new people don't like it, they can lump it. To these people, I say look at the membership figures. It is the gliding movement, not the people who leave the sport, who's lumping it.

#### **One club's research**

The Adelaide Soaring Club recently conducted a detailed phone survey of new members who had joined the club in 1992 and did not renew their membership in 1993. Rather than being an exercise in asking why these people had not rejoined, the aim of the survey was to find out these peoples' attitudes to a range of club and gliding related issues and to gain a knowledge of areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Quality of training and the club itself were not given as the reasons why these people did not renew their membership. The overriding reason why these trainees, although keen on gliding, did not rejoin was the time commitment that current gliding training practices required of them and the amount of field work required in relation to the amount of flying gained. They simply could not afford the time we demand of them.

Club facilities, or rather lack of them, were the second major area of dissatisfaction. Cost was not cited as the major factor for nonrenewals, although some of these people had changes in personal circumstances such as buying a home which meant that gliding was now an unaffordable luxury for them. However, most said that they would like to return to gliding at a later stage when their circumstances permitted. I would say if other clubs undertook similar research, they may find some similar results.

#### **Range of leisure activities**

Compared to a decade ago, people have a far wider choice of accessible leisure activities. That's more activities gliding has to compete with in terms of attracting membership. As far as aviation is concerned, gliding competes with power flying, hang gliding, paragliding, micro- and ultralights, parachuting, ballooning and to a lesser extent, radio-controlled models. For a person on an "average" budget who is interested in aviation, that's a lot to choose from. While some of these activities would only be able to be pursued by higher income earners, some of them are more accessible, less time consuming and, in some cases, are as expensive (or even cheaper in the long term) than gliding. The challenge for us is to evaluate how we compare with these activities and how we can become more competitive and attractive, so that more people will choose gliding as their preferred aviation interest.

#### **How gliding is perceived**

Let's leave the aviation-minded person aside for the present and consider the many people who know very little about flying and even less about gliding. What is their image of gliding? How is it perceived by the market place? As we don't have any concrete research in this area, it is hard to accurately say. However, many of us have come across comments and beliefs about gliding such as these:

- dangerous (they fall out of the sky, especially when the wind stops)
- a 'daredevil' sport for 'thrill-seekers'
- you wouldn't get me up in one of those. They don't look safe / strong enough / big enough / etc.

- I don't feel safe unless there's a motor in front (how little these people know!)
- how can they stay up? (it's that wind)

If gliding is really perceived by the general masses as a dangerous sport for thrill-seekers who like to take to the skies in flimsy, motorless aircraft that crash to the ground when the wind stops, we've got a big image problem on our hands. No amount of general "gliding" promotion or advertising will persuade people to think otherwise, let alone persuade them to try it!

Marketing people use the term "positioning" to describe how they want their product or service to be perceived by the marketplace. The gliding movement would do well to undertake some research and embark upon some positioning exercises of its own.

**What do we do?** I strongly believe that before the gliding movement embarks upon any promotion or marketing initiatives with the aim of increasing membership, it needs to address the changing needs of our potential members in the 90s and beyond. We need to pay attention to and come to grips with the changes that are continually taking place, and take a fresh and creative look at how they operate in order to respond to them. This means that we have to look at every area of how we operate, including training structures, facilities and our expectations of members in order to find more appropriate and efficient ways of servicing them. This is the place to start if we want to build a stronger membership base in the long term. Without addressing these fundamental problems, any single effort to promote gliding will be a waste of both money and time. ❖

## What does the "customer" see at your club?

**Gerald Ince** 1994/1

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS I have observed an ongoing discussion in *free flight* and among SAC members about what can be done about declining club memberships. I don't claim to have a solution, but let me create a scenario for you at this point that occurs at times at unfortunate clubs ...

A visitor to a Canadian club has heard about it through word of mouth. They go out of their way to find the airfield and yet, on arrival, their reception is indifferent at best. After spending several hours of their weekend waiting for a flight, they leave the field without receiving any membership information. They do not even have the name or phone number of a contact person. Sound familiar? These visitors don't always suffer in silence. The following are some complaints I have overheard while sitting around the flightline:

- It's hard to find out about the club. The club doesn't advertise and there is no phone listing in the telephone book.
- It's hard to find the airfield. Maps and road signs are nonexistent.
- The club is disorganized. No one seems to be in charge, no one knows what is going on, and no one speaks to guests. When your name finally gets to the top of the flight manifest, no one has tow tickets for sale, and no one has the proper change.
- You have to wait too long for a flight. Worse, no one is able to accurately tell how much longer the wait will be.
- The club's facilities are inadequate. There are no bathrooms, food, drink, seating or shade on the flightline.

Given that the intro is generally the initial step towards club membership, first impressions are critical. Glider pilots often do a terrible job of selling our sport – failing to address the wants and needs of people who are actively seeking us out. The perception of the sport that a visitor takes home begins to form the moment they step out of their vehicle. Are the people friendly? Is the flightline well-organized or does it operate haphazardly? Is the equipment clean and well maintained? Do things look safe? A positive experience can, in some cases, be the difference between an afternoon in the country and a commitment to learning a new sport. ❖

# Air Cadet training

**George Eckschmiedt** 1994/6

HAVING MYSELF LEARNED TO FLY under (vaguely) similar circumstances as the Air Cadets, I think the Cadets are the best thing Canada can offer to its youngsters. It teaches them responsibility, discipline, team spirit and cooperation that sets them up well in life later. I have immensely enjoyed working with them once in a while, when their instructors were allowed to come to Hope and experience soaring. By the way, it did not happen in the last few years. The cadets were attentive, listened to the briefing we gave them, and most of the time they were cooperative and receptive.

The raw record shown is very impressive and the organization is obviously doing a good job of training, under their circumstances. But there is a lot more. The soaring movement receives the cadets after the League is through with them and for that, we are grateful. But our experience with them has been widely variable. We have some very wonderful pilots who got their initial training with the cadets and continued their training with the clubs. I could name quite a few, right in my club. But, then there are those youngsters, who for whatever reason, when they are out of the cadets think that now they can do anything and everything. All of a sudden the military-style discipline is no longer required and enforced, so they think they are free. Some ex-cadets join the club, come out to fly, do their flying and go home, or wherever. I am sorry to say, but there has yet to be a year when some of them don't have to be reminded that more is expected from them. Our club has had some nice young fellows joining us this year, but some of them have already been required to be informed to "do the line". I do not know if the cadets teach whip-stalls, but that was very close to what I observed one of the unlicensed ex-cadet students do! We did not teach them, I doubt if the cadets did, so they try on their own. It is almost as if the cadet thinks the chain has been removed from them, freedom at last ...

I reiterate strongly, the idea of providing a purpose to the cadets is great, but I often wonder if giving glider training to the level defined by the Air Cadet League is good or bad. The cadets come out of their training thinking they are full-fledged glider pilots. After all they are licensed, are they not? This brings up the issue of the value of the licence, but I would rather not elaborate on this. One of the major problems, as I see it is that for the last quarter century (yes it has been that long) there has been no communication between the Air Cadets and the soaring world. If the cadet organization has been misunderstood by many, I am certain we all know where the reason lies. Various SAC groups have been trying to initiate dialogue with the Air Cadet organization in Ottawa and we have received the cold shoulder treatment consistently, with "we know what we are doing, do not bother us." What is more, on the local level we learned that the cadets were actively discouraged of making contact with the soaring pilots! I can imagine the reasoning of the Cadet leadership; contact with the soaring clubs may interfere with the cadet training syllabus. Also, horror stories are abound: if the cadet doesn't solo in 25 flights, he is washed out of the program. Heavens, many clubs don't allow solo under 35 flights.

Sometimes I wonder what the real objective of the Air Cadet glider training is. Is it to provide glider flying training, or is the glider flying training used as a tool to provide something to the youngsters? Both philosophies are acceptable of course, only the emphasis is different, and that should be acknowledged. Continuing, I often wonder if the cadet's training is serving the gliding/soaring discipline, or serving an Air Cadet League purpose. Obviously, it is good for the youngsters, but are we not deceiving them by making them believe that they are fully licensed pilots, when in fact they (on the average) will require quite some further training before they can be safely soloed elsewhere in a glider? Whose purpose does this training serve: the cadet's, or the Air Cadet organization?

Please remember that I'm not attacking the cadet movement – I said before, it's the best thing Canada can offer our youngsters, and I can see that it can be the optimum of all youth organizations. But is it good enough? The many attempts to establish communication with the cadets that resulted in cold shoulder reception suggests that the cadet movement itself thinks it is good enough. If the glider training is used to teach young people discipline, respect and airmindedness, then perhaps it is good enough. But for glider pilot training ... well, other people may have different experiences.

Why not soar? Why do we substitute quantity for quality? I wonder about the emphasis on the sheer number of the "pilots" being trained. I was trained under that consideration, and I know we were trained to be the fodder for the air force. Fifteen primaries side by side, catapulted up one after another. The landing area was

# SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS

## 8 Rules to happy soaring

An open letter to the new club executive from the past-President

- Rule #1     **Remember, we are all here to fly gliders and have fun.**
- Rule #2     **When things get tough, and the whiners and the complainers start to get to you, remember Rule #1.**
- Rule #3     **When the persons mentioned in Rule #2 really start to get to you, ignore them and refer to Rule #1.**
- Rule #4     **Consider the source. If someone whose views you respect tells you that there is something wrong, maybe there is. But, then again, maybe there isn't. In case of confusion, refer to Rule #1.**
- Rule #5     **There is nothing so important that it cannot be postponed to a non-soaring day. (This is really Rule #1 stated differently).**
- Rule #6     **Insist that all your directions be obeyed promptly and to the letter – particularly, “Take up the slack” and “All out”.**
- Rule #7     **Delegate authority. Nobody will listen to you anyway, so they might as well not listen to somebody else while you go follow Rule #1.**
- Rule #8     **Keep your sense of humour. People will try to take it away from you, but it's hard to follow Rule #1 without one.**

If I can be of some help this year, please don't hesitate to call. You'll have some trouble catching up with me though. I will be at Hope, or Ephrata, or on the safari, or anywhere glider pilots gather to follow Rule #1.

**Dave Baker**, Vancouver Soaring Association

### Air Cadet training – concluded

interesting for the tenth-and-up students to land, so I know about the numbers. A few of the trainees stuck with gliding, but for most of them only the memories of the experience remained. It would be interesting to learn how many of the 570 or so annually licensed pilots stay with aviation. If only 10% remained with soaring, SAC membership would not be dwindling, but rising.

As of late, the rumbling is that the cadet movement is now opening up and will be receptive to dialogue. Wonderful! No one wants to “interfere” with the movement. No sane soaring pilot would want to discourage what they are doing. The graduates of the movement are perhaps the best hope we have for an upturn in the number of our soaring pilots. But a closed ear/mind attitude that was experienced for the last 25 years will serve no useful purpose.

If I didn't find the subject close to my heart, I would not bother writing. My objective is to encourage open dialogue, to foster better cooperation between the organizations and to improve the training and safety all around. Perhaps the soaring organizations should not be so “stuffy” (if we are) and perhaps the cadet movement should also realize that a lot of training expertise is available for them from the civilian movement. ❖

# More than 2¢ worth!

**Svein Hubinette** 1996/1

IN THE LAST ISSUE of *free flight*, Pierre [Pepin] asks whether anyone has any opinions on SAC matters. Of course – we all do, the problem is finding a forum where people can freely, easily and preferably instantaneously exchange ideas and opinions and feel that their input is listened to. Certainly *free flight* should be an important part, but it also has to be a two way dialogue and I have seen very little on what tasks our committees and board members are engaged in and their accomplishments and progress. To name a few:

- At the 1994 AGM we were told SAC had a committee to deal with issues relating to Transport Canada. I'm sure the committee is working hard on our behalf, but nothing has appeared in the five issues of *free flight* published since then. Instead, our only source of information has been from the press, the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association and the Recreational Aircraft Association, and they are not dealing with our issues.
- Internet. This is possibly the most significant communication tool ever. Some clubs have set up their own "home pages" and have done a good job of it, but a central SAC site is sorely missing. Canada is one of the most "wired" countries so we really should be ahead of the game. A popular home site could expect thousands of "visits" per year. If anybody is willing to set up a site I'm willing to give my two cents as to content and layout. I propose that SAC immediately set up a permanent home site to provide a central source on the Canadian soaring scene including forums, news and advertising. With the amount of "visitors" we can expect, I feel it will not be difficult to get sponsors so we might even turn a profit! The SAC national office and *free flight* editor must be on-line. This will make it much easier to communicate – articles, photos and graphics can be sent instantly through e-mail and reduce the work load of our editor and allow him to concentrate on more productive tasks. It should also do much to promote Canadian content in *free flight* (another problem Pierre mentioned).
- I feel we and most other aviation groups in Canada do a poor job of cooperating and the Aero Club of Canada situation proves it. We all tend to put on our blinkers to try and ignore what goes on around us. Think what we could do with more cooperation/integration as is successfully done in other countries ...

That we may have a national team again is also very positive and I wish all those involved the best of luck. Although the Canadian Advanced Soaring Group is positive for the movement, I feel it must strive for wider membership which the current \$25 subscription does not do. Why not lower the fee and make it optional in addition to the SAC fee, so one T4 slip could be issued. The FAI sporting licence should also be integrated with this. With a wider membership base you should also be able to reduce the entry fees for competition pilots. The aims of the group are good and to make membership more attractive I suggest they add [a Canada Cup] to their objectives – many countries have a series of mini-competitions held over weekends throughout the season at different locations. I suggest four to five be held annually and evenly geographically located. Each contest winner would be declared and the overall scores be computed on a best of, say, three competitions. The overall results would count towards national seeding. Do this and I will join! ❖

*Postscript, 2008 This is the first reference to the web and anticipates SAC's move to Internet use – his suggestion on many small competitions presages what now is the OLC. Tony*

**Bob Gairns responds** 1996/2

This is in reply to Svein Hubinette's letter in which he requests that SAC be more active in representing the interests of glider pilots with Transport Canada. What Svein should realize is that the association has only two paid persons in Ottawa looking after a host of items concerning gliding club members across the country. Heads of committees are all unpaid volunteers.

The difference between the Soaring Association and such bodies as COPA, RAAC, and the EAA Canadian Council is numbers of members. Because of their large memberships, these organizations have significant influence on the policies of Transport Canada. They also have more funds available and can afford paid staff to look after various items, although they also depend as we do on unpaid volunteers. In answer to Svein's Internet source for gliding information, he should be given the opportunity to set up a committee to implement this proposal. The information in the last issue of *free flight* shows what some noble volunteers are doing on behalf of SAC members. SAC is not 'they', it is 'we'. ❖



# The \$100 hit, tax receipts & Pioneer power

## Accounting 101 for the numerically challenged

Jim McCollum 1997/6

WERE SAC FEES close to a \$100 hit in 1997? This appears to be a common perception within the soaring community and this view has appeared in print in *free flight* (see Letters & Opinions, 2/97). I'll show here that virtually no one in SAC paid anything remotely near that amount and also that the Pioneer fund offers a tremendous opportunity for the soaring movement to increase its well-being, and that changes in the 1997 federal budget have enhanced this.

**Tax receipts** SAC is registered with Revenue Canada as an amateur sports organization, enabling it to issue official receipts for income tax purposes for bona fide donations, including membership fees. By *bona fide*, I mean donations and similar contributions consistent with the terms of the relevant sections of the Income Tax Act and associated regulations. These receipts result in a tax credit (page 3 of your federal income tax return), rather than a deduction from taxable income (page 2 of the return) and, as such, have the same value for low and high income earners, insofar as their basic federal and provincial income taxes are concerned.

A possible confusion between deductions and credits appears to be the main reason why some have the impression that one has to be in a high income tax bracket for the receipt to have much value. A tax credit of a given amount has exactly the same impact on an individual's basic federal and provincial income taxes, regardless of income level. The only exception to this is if the person has no taxable income. So, the receipts issued by SAC reduce four taxes – federal income tax and surtax, as well as provincial income tax and surtax. Surtaxes change the equation somewhat and make the receipt slightly more valuable to higher income earners, since they are more likely to be in the position of paying surtaxes.

**SAC membership fees** In calculating personal income taxes, total donations (including SAC fees) of \$200 or less are eligible for a 17% federal tax credit. Once the \$200 donation threshold has been reached, the tax credit rises to 29%. With reference to the 1997 \$99 SAC adult membership fee, basic federal income taxes would be reduced by \$18.83 if one remained under the \$200 threshold, or by \$28.71 if one was already at or above it. Provincial income taxes are calculated as a percentage of the basic federal tax and average about 53%. In this example, provincial taxes would be reduced by \$8.92 or \$15.93 depending on whether one remains under the threshold, or is already at or above it. Thus, before consideration of surtaxes, the after-tax cost of a full adult membership in SAC is reduced by between \$25.75 (26%) and \$44.93 (44.4%) and the most that SAC can cost you is \$73.25. Intermediate results obtain if total donations, including SAC fees, fall in the \$201-\$298 range. (The range is somewhat wider, since the provincial percentage varies across Canada.)

Federal and provincial surtaxes (taxes imposed on taxes) introduce an element of income sensitivity to the value of the tax receipt, boosting its value by up to an additional 8% or so. Assuming the \$200 donation level had already been reached, the after-tax cost of belonging to SAC would fall in an approximate range of \$47 to \$54. By way of comparison, the cost of belonging to the SSA is in the Cdn\$75-\$80 range, or about 60% higher.

**Trust fund donations** Similar percentages apply to donations to the SAC trust funds, although in these cases a donor is more likely to already be above the \$200 threshold, so the higher percentage for the federal tax credit would apply. Thus a \$500 donation to the Pioneer Trust fund would fall in the \$235-\$278 range in after-tax cost, with the latter figure being relevant for the no surtax situation.

**Consider donating securities** With the February 1997 federal budget, tax regulations were changed to further encourage charitable donations. For donations in the form of appreciated marketable securities, the rate at which capital gains are taken into taxable income was halved from 75% to 37.5%. Thus if one is considering making a donation to SAC, as well as realizing some gains on marketable securities, there is a tax advantage to donating the securities directly, rather than realizing the gain and then making the donation. On average, according to Department of Finance calculations, this can confer an additional 12% benefit to the donor, moving the value of the tax receipt into the 56% (no surtaxes) to 65% range, and the cost of a \$500 donation could be as low as \$175.

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# Another pitch for lower cost gliding

## – the downside of upgrading –

**Len Gelfand** 1988/2 & 1998/4

MORE AND MORE EVIDENCE is pointing to the conclusion that glider pilots are harmful to the sport. We are preventing gliding from becoming more popular than it is by increasing its cost rather than lowering it. We are making it more costly by buying more modern and expensive gliders instead of the older and less costly ones for flying during the early and intermediate stages of a pilot's soaring career. We also look down our noses at cheaper launches by winch rather than towplane.

Until some market research is done, we can only guess at the reasons why people don't participate in soaring. But it's quite likely that such research would show cost as one of the important ones. And if you doubt that there is a substantial market for low cost flying, look at the general aviation scene in the last 15 or so years.

As the price of power flying rose, the amount of flying dropped. The subsequent vicious circle of increased costs and decreased popularity of flying reached the point where manufacturers stopped production of the ubiquitous Pipers and Cessnas of yesteryear. During this period, those who wanted to fly turned in droves to the much lower cost hang gliders and ultralights, many of which made a 2-33 look like a beautiful work of art. At the same time, the homebuilt movement, also characterized by relatively inexpensive flying, expanded substantially. In the last ten to fifteen years, the number of people flying the lower cost and often visually unattractive ultralights in Canada rose from zero to over 5000, while our gliding population, transitioning to more elegant, expensive, and better performing machinery, remained pretty well unchanged at about 1500, give or take a few hundred. It's anybody's guess how many of the people who opted for low cost flying would have been attracted to our sport if we had lowered the cost of non-competitive gliding. Some flyers who went the ultralight or homebuilt route probably wanted the advantages that an engine gives. But if we had attracted one out of five to gliding, not an unreasonable proportion in my view, we would have almost doubled the number of SAC members. And this example deals only with a segment of population that now flies.

Cost is not the only impediment to the greater popularity of soaring but it is one of those that is relatively easy for us to control. Suppose a club has enough money to buy a glass two-seater for about \$32,000. It could instead, buy a used 2-33 or other comparably priced two-seater for about \$12,000, and invest the \$20,000 it would have spent for the 'better' glider in something like Treasury Bills which would now earn around 8% or about \$1600 annually. This income could be used in a number of ways. One would be to subsidize 2-33 flying. If the 2-33 made 320 flights in one year, the club could lower the cost of each flight by \$5. Or it could use the income to provide free membership in the club to several students or Air Cadets or former

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### **The power of Pioneer philanthropy**

Should you say phooey when it comes to donating to the Pioneer fund? As discussed, donations to the Pioneer fund are eligible for a tax receipt which significantly reduces the cost of donating. Additionally, earnings on the fund are not subject to taxation, which means the value of your donation can build up reasonably rapidly over time. Because the earnings are protected from taxation, there is something to be said for front loading donations, rather than stringing donations out over time. The net cost to the donor to achieve the same effect on SAC's finances would be lower with front loading.

By way of example of the power of the Pioneer fund to improve our financial circumstances, consider a hypothetical example, that of Rodney Raskolnikov who donated some \$14,000 spread out during the past decade and a half or so. The after-tax cost of these donations would have been around \$7000, perhaps a bit less. The effect of these donations (including unrealized capital gains) on the value of the fund is in the \$35,000 neighbourhood. During this period membership averaged about 1340 per year. If all SAC members had a similar donation profile, the fund would now be worth in excess approximately \$47 million. If they had donated one tenth as much (at a net after-tax cost of around \$700) the fund would still be worth close to \$5 million. Had Mr. Raskolnikov front loaded his donations, they would now have a current value of \$58,000 – if all members did likewise the Pioneer fund would be worth around \$80 million!

❖



members who have quit for financial reasons. I'm sure the ingenuity of people in our sport would create many ideas for other ways of using this \$1600 to get more participants in soaring than a \$32,000 machine would, or to produce more flying by those now in it.

The same rationale can be applied to intermediate level club flying. Rather than spending \$30,000 on something like a single place Astir, a club could spend \$10,000 on a Ka6, Skylark, or similarly priced glider, invest the remainder and use the income to lower the cost of flying the cheaper machine. In fact, at the intermediate pilot level, the club could buy three of the cheaper airplanes for the price of the expensive one, would produce much more flying for the same investment.

Nobody in their right mind can suggest that there's no place for the expensive, state-of-the-art sailplanes available today. But I believe that our fascination with these beautiful performers has been a factor in preventing us from seeing the benefits of the older, cheaper, poorer performers. As long as we continue our present fixation with upgrading, while denigrating the usefulness of the cheaper ships, cheaper launch methods, etc.), the Canadian soaring community will continue to be a tiny group with all the problems that small size creates.

While there are some soaring pilots who do not want our numbers to increase, I think that most of us see the benefits that could result from more people participating in the sport, benefits such as a better new and used glider market, having more influence on government, and being able to finance our top pilots in international competitions. When we have to devote so much effort and money to gliders, launching and airports, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that our product is gliding/soaring. Let's take those actions which will increase the volume of this activity, even if it means sometimes favouring cheaper, less modern methods to achieve it. ❖

*Len kicked an ant's nest with his opinion on fleet upgrading – here are some responses:*

**Mike Morgulis, SOSA** AFTER READING the inside cover of the last issue of *free flight*, it's easy to see why soaring is dying in Canada. I bashed my head against a wall at SOSA along with some other Board members trying to improve the fleet, but in the end they opted to buy older fibreglass technology and retain the 2-33s and I-26s. Odd – in Europe they have good numbers in the sport, they don't train in 2-33s or I-26s, some clubs even offer a Discus as a beginner single seater. Having recently flown Kurt Meyer's Discus, I can safely say that it's as easy as a Ka6, and if money were no object, it should be a single-seater in most clubs here too.

I don't recall my ego being boosted as a result of flying a Twin Grob but I do recall being proud that I could fly it well and then take it 160 kilometres on an afternoon flight. I don't think I was looked upon as a loser for flying a K-13, Blanik, or 2-33, but I was sure limited in how far away I was willing to fly. Obtaining a higher performance two-place fibreglass sailplane allows a club to have a more useful plane in its fleet. One must ask, "What is the purpose of instructing pilots?" Is it to keep the coffers full of money by using a paid-up plane to train pilots? Is it to make better pilots which we hope to retain? Are we training pilots so that they can't stray more than twenty kilometres from the field?

At SOSA the Twin Grobs have the highest use and earn more than the 2-33s, even though 2-33s are what the system pushes as the ab-initio trainer. At Air Sailing the Twin Grob is the plane of choice every day, it gets rolled out first and put away last. Cross-country training can be done in the Twins with much greater ease than in a K-13, 2-33 or Blanik.

If one wants to look at things from a purely financial viewpoint, yes, keep your 40/50 year old planes and hope that nobody knows better. But driving schools don't use Studebakers. If you want your pilots to hang around the club and not achieve anything then, yes, keep them in older planes. By keeping pilots local, the possibility of landouts are reduced, so is damage, and so is liability ... but so is membership.

If one wants to train pilots who will eventually own their own sailplane, probably fibreglass 40:I or so, it would be wise to use a plane with similar characteristics. Do you honestly believe that someone can go from a 2-33 to a CS-77? I have a hard time swallowing the blanket statement that upgrading a fleet could be a disaster for the club, and that two-seat fibreglass planes are for egos only. Only a fool would not look into good financial planning and rush out and buy something the club couldn't afford, be it a towplane, a new single seater, or even the field itself.

What clubs need are leaders and members who can look ahead about 15 years to where they want to be. MSC got rid of their 2-33s, so did Winnipeg. The Blaniks and K-13s will get timed out eventually as well. And so will the control freaks who are ruining the sport by not listening to the club pilots, who want to rule down and not train up. It's much less work to teach in older planes, but really, what good are you doing by telling clubs not to improve their fleets? If that were the case then why don't we see two-place speed records being set in Blaniks? ... What good is it to tell people not to improve the quality of airplanes? Obviously then there's no interest in improving the quality of the club pilots either, and thus the sport is dead.

**Fred Hunkeler, SOSA**      The status of the aging Canadian training fleet and the moves being made by clubs to improve their fleets indicates that Canadian glider pilots are not willing to communally pay for better equipment. The fleet improvements by MSC, Winnipeg, SOSA, Gatineau etc. are basically replacement of old technology with slightly less old technology. This holds true of power flying clubs as well. There are very few power flying clubs that are flying new technology such as Katanas. Why? Because we can still learn the theory and practical aspects of flying in older technology equipment. The theory of flight hasn't changed.

The theory of fleet improvement is similar to that of owning a car. If it's running well, it still has value to the owner. With small repairs over time this car will continue to run, but the longer the owner waits, the more expensive the newer cars will become. If an owner keeps a car too long, it suddenly becomes worthless to sell and the new cars are now unaffordable. The alternative is to buy a newer old/used one. With aircraft, and unlike the auto industry, you can buy a brand new copy of an older design, helping to extend the usable time for the aircraft. Most 15-20 year old gelcoated fibreglass club gliders require a \$15-20,000 refinish job. This is still preferable from a financial standpoint, since new technology such as the Duo-Discus is just too expensive to purchase and maintain. However, are we fooling ourselves – will the difference in the price of new and old become so great one day in the future that we won't be able to afford to replace our aging glider fleets?

**Jim Oke, Winnipeg**      ... While I do not agree with his "solution", I think that Len Gelfand has done a useful service by pointing out the equipment/resource conundrum faced by most clubs, large and small, in Canada (and elsewhere). The essential question to ask is, "What mix of sailplanes (and other equipment and facilities) will best serve the needs of the members and ensure the long term viability of the club?"

... I agree with Len that owning big, expensive gliders that few can fly and which rarely pay their way from an accounting standpoint is not a good idea. However going too far the other way with "3 older two-seaters" may not be much better. Sure, there are more opportunities to fly: once the maintenance on three older aircraft is done (probably involving ten times the volunteer labour as required on a nice new fibreglass two-seater), once adequate hangar space is provided for three probably more delicate aircraft (which will cost more), once the club antes up for another towplane for the extra tows (a lot more costs there too), once another volunteer towpilot is found and trained (need more than one to fill the schedule actually), etc. Sorry, there's no free lunch in running a glider operation.

Is money the main factor? Yes and no; cheap flying is nice but not if it means lots more time at the club doing the odd jobs that come with low-end equipment. I also agree with Len that putting some dollars into a bigger and better mower (so that the grass gets cut quicker and easier) or hiring a few students to paint the hangar doors, muck out the outhouses, etc. might be money very well spent. My personal perception is that most "committed" glider pilots are limited more by the personal recreation time available than by cash. Others can make their own assessment. Then again, is the club there to provide the current members with the kind and amount of flying they want, or is it there to provide a public service to give the general public exposure to gliding and an opportunity to go for a ride.

I don't suggest there are easy answers to these questions or even consistent ones from club to club. It is clear is that you have to get it right to serve your own club's needs when making significant equipment and budget choices. Any debate that helps the right decision get made for your club's circumstances is useful.

**Mike Glatiotis, Cu Nim**      I too was somewhat disturbed by the article by Mr. Gelfand. We are watching a steadily declining interest in soaring with experienced members dropping to the wayside and

not being replaced by the young and keen pilots who will shape its future, but I do not believe that the cost necessarily is the barrier. Surely, discouraging fleet upgrades will ensure that younger pilots will stay away. Leading edge technology in hang gliding and paragliding consistently draws the attention of young pilots. These rapidly evolving aircraft now approach the performance of a 2-33. It is human nature to be drawn to the best that we can offer. Just watch a group of today's pilots swarm around the new Ventus 2CM while being careful not to slip on the drool on the tarmac.

I think a more important route to change is to overhaul the instruction process that new pilots are offered. Our world has changed and has become increasingly fast paced and small. The time commitment in obtaining a licence, which presently can be two years (at least out west), is the biggest barrier to encouraging new pilots in this busy world. Aviation is without question an expensive pastime, but I would suggest that the barrier of time is much greater than that of expense. Anyone truly interested in learning to fly anything, in my opinion, would gladly suffer a hit in the pocketbook over the short term than have to commit to two years of intermittent cheap flying just in order to get a licence. The carrot of being able to fly an aesthetic aircraft at the end of the process is a draw that shouldn't be underestimated.

Clubs, by virtue of their size and membership, provide the best venue for obtaining and supporting newer aircraft. Certainly, older ships offer the very best value in training and should not be eliminated from a fleet, but the lure of progress to better and sleeker aircraft is what will keep new pilots with us, assuming we can keep them interested throughout the training process.

**Jean Richard, Champlain** While I still believe that our "poor" training system contributes more than our old sailplane fleet to soaring decline in North America, I don't agree at all with the author of "The downside of upgrading". He writes: *"Let's imagine a club intending to spend \$70,000 for a glass two-seater. Instead, it could buy three old ones and have lots of money left over for additional maintenance costs ..."*

I would first ask Mr. Gelfand when was the last time he consulted the classifieds. Take the last ten issues of *free flight* and tell me how many flyable "less than \$20,000" twin seat trainers you saw? A safe and ready-to-fly trainer for less than \$20,000 doesn't exist any more. Well, there are still somewhat clean Blaniks for \$15-20,000 on the market (if you are very lucky), but they have usually just a few hundred hours left. Is it a real bargain? I'm not sure.

The twin-seater used market is almost empty, and don't waste your time trying to find "new" used sailplanes. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that in Canada more twin-seaters are written off or simply put out of flying condition than new ones are bought. Maybe those who have access to SAC statistics can answer this; how many twin-seaters are registered in Canadian clubs compared to the early eighties? Then, the next question to Mr. Gelfand: how can you have more trainers, more flights, more sailplane pilots if you only count on the non-existent used market? Soaring cannot grow if the trainer fleet shrinks. So we have to buy new sailplanes to increase soaring training availability – it's a logical consequence.

Our club proved last year how easy it is to increase membership. This year, we had to shut our doors – too many new members ... When a club reaches an ideal size it should then give help to younger and smaller clubs. Large, rich, and well established clubs that stop growing by design must help. One good way to do it is by buying new twin-seaters so they can put their older ones on the used market and make possible the birth of a new club. In 1994, Le Club de Vol à Voile de Québec bought a new twin-seater and sold the old one to a new club in British Columbia. The Montreal Soaring Council bought two new trainers and sold two older ones to a smaller and not-so-rich club. But I know there are large, well-established clubs that stick to their old trainers though they have enough money to buy new ones. Seen from the broad soaring community viewpoint, it's a selfish attitude. There are many small clubs in Canada that can only afford a used Blanik, ASK-13, or even a Schweizer. It's more difficult for those small clubs to buy those old sailplanes than for a rich club to buy a more modern ASK-21. But instead of buying new trainers, those old, rich, large, and well-established clubs stick to their old trainers, helping to create an inflationist trend on the used market. Once again, I consider it a shame.

Finally, in a country where our standard of living can be compared to western Europe or USA, in a country where there's a lot of luxury cars on the road, two or three cars around a single house, why is an ASK-21 considered a luxury fancy sailplane when it's a basic trainer in many clubs in Europe? Is our sport sick? ❖

# Can freezing a club's membership increase it?

**Robert Victor** 1999/2

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT on Pierre Pepin's editorial in the Feb/Mar 99 *free flight*. He wrote: Statistics show that we are on a membership plateau at slightly above 1300 members. Jim tells me that every year 300 members go off our list, 200 of these are first year members who do not come back. Why? We need to find out because, collectively, we are bleeding away our resources. Comfort in soaring comes when clubs are at the 60+ members range. At that level, you get good utilization of assets, and the per member costs are low while allowing the club to give good service to its members.

Boosting the popularity of soaring and the size of club rosters is a preoccupation for many clubs, their executive, and glider pilots in general. The reasoning is that more pilots means growth – bigger numbers, more income for clubs and our national association, more clout within the aviation community in general – all of which, in theory, is good for the sport. But we're having trouble getting those numbers up. Why?

Those 200 first-year members (about 15% of our national membership) that never come back after the first year suggests to me that we don't have a problem recruiting members – we have problems keeping them. As any good marketer will tell you, your sales effort may get people in the door, but it'll be your service that keeps 'em coming back. So is there something wrong with our service?

To use some very round figures, our club (Champlain) has boosted membership from about 50 two years ago to somewhere around 90 at the end of last season. The majority of the 40 new members fall into the student category; that is, they fly club ships exclusively. Of the previous 50 members, about half own their own gliders, so the remaining pilots fly those same club ships. Some simple math will tell you that the demands for time on club gliders has better than doubled, with no increase in their numbers.

By any measure, the accessibility to those resources for new members has worsened substantially. Teaching students to fly and providing them with gliders to do it in is the service we provide, and however good it was before, it's not getting better, it's getting worse. New student members at our club provide the bulk of our revenues; keen as they are, many will take three or four flights a day, and bring in more cash in rentals and tows than five times their number of other pilots. I hear it said over and over that "new recruits are good for revenues", but are they getting a level of service proportional to the cash they bring in?

There's an argument to be made that, if the answer to this question is "No", these members are actually subsidizing the other activities of the club. To be cynical in the extreme, one could wonder if the first-year student who never comes back isn't actually the most "profitable" member a club can have – he or she deposits the most money into club coffers in that first year, but doesn't tie up club ships and services for several more years down the road. Clubs need to make a concerted effort to ensure that the "service" new members get jibes with what they spend as a group. Viewing them as "good for the bottom line" is a mistake.

Extra revenue coming from new members should be turned directly around to provide services for new members – more ships, instruction, training aids, faster progress through the ranks, and so on. Were we to adopt that thinking, we'd be seeing them not as profit centres, but rather as customers entitled to value for their money. Ask any businessman; such a view is the key to turning "sales" into long-term clients.

When I joined AVVC two years ago as a partially-trained student, I received an excellent level of "service" from the club – top quality training, a reasonable accessibility to gliders, and bags of support and advice from older members. Last year, it was a struggle to get glider time with so many new recruits vying for the same aircraft, and next year – well, who knows... If it were held to a vote right now, I would vote to freeze membership levels at our club until our resources caught up with the demand, and to make sure that they do.

One might speculate that freezing memberships is a poor solution to foster growth in the sport, but I'd argue the opposite – long term growth comes from developing long-term clients, and you do that by taking good care of the clients you have today. Every time I hear it mentioned that new recruits are "good for revenues", I cringe. Were our new recruits seen and treated as revenue-neutral, we'd know it's because we were putting the money they bring in back into the services they require. That would lead to more satisfied "customers", and the satisfied customer, as any businessman will tell you, is the one who comes back. ❖

# Plan, before you're forced to

**Tony Burton** 2005/2

*A large part of this text has been taken from an article in Sailplane & Gliding magazine written by Diana King, chairman of the BGA's Development committee.*

A CLUB MAY DISCOVER that it has an exciting opportunity to acquire some new property, such as extra land, or perhaps a glider. It may, somewhat belatedly, realize it needs to look for a new site or raise the funds to buy their existing land. Let me present a scenario: Cu Nim's airfield at Black Diamond was once a long way from external pressures – now there's an ATC altitude cap over the field which cramps training and cross-country flying, nearby farmland is filling with houses on acreages and tow-plane noise complaints have begun. The airfield property is becoming more valuable, taxes may rise, and the property is steadily becoming more attractive for use as something other than an airfield. Even if local government and flying restrictions didn't press the club to find another location, a land developer could present it with "an offer it couldn't refuse". So when is the time to have a plan – now, or when a move is only a season away?

The club's question can become, "we need to spend a lot of money on this new opportunity/problem – where is it going to come from and can we apply for a grant?" My question to them is whether they have a business plan and/or Development Plan in place. Why do you need a business plan? For a start, any club needs to know where it wants to go before it starts spending money for the trip. Your poor treasurer is usually busy with the here and now – do you have a Fleet/Land committee to deal with the future? If you are looking for a significant grant from a funding agency, they will require some form of business plan as part of any application. Funding is also usually limited to a percentage of the project costs so it is important for the club to be able to show how it will raise the difference, either through grants or loans, and how loans will be serviced and repaid.

The time to write these plans is when you have time to talk to your members properly, think through all the issues and generally take the time to make a really good job of the task. That way, you can have more confidence you have really identified the club's aims and are more likely to have the support of all the members to achieve the aims. Trying to write a plan in a hurry, simply in order to jump through a hoop of someone else's making, is much more difficult and stressful and doesn't always lead to a good result. Another reason for a written plan is to make unexpected decisions easier. If you have strategic plans about the direction you want the club to go over the next few years, it is much easier to see how a decision fits into that background. Some people resist the idea of treating a voluntary club as a business. However, while clubs are voluntary organizations, we must still be businesslike in the way we run ourselves. Dealing in a professional way with the club's affairs sometimes makes for less work in the long run. I say 'professional' to indicate that, even as volunteers, we should aim not to be amateurish.

So, how to go about making a plan? This is your chance to use some imagination and an opportunity to make a real difference to your club's future. It can be fun brainstorming what your ideal gliding club would look like! Plans don't need to be very complicated, but they are more likely to succeed if members are consulted. You should aim to identify the club's strengths and weaknesses, recognize the opportunities open to you, and consider threats which the club might face. Potential crises should be considered, so appropriate safeguards can be put in place, and new ideas should be aired. When these building blocks are in place, you can create a plan for how you, with the members, want to see the club develop for the future, including general policies on membership, property and equipment and financial plans. If major capital projects are in the pipeline, clubs may need to be more self-sufficient as the availability and amount of grants reduces.

As part of the process, it can be useful to prepare a Sports Development Plan. This will typically include targets for membership numbers, the sort of flying you all hope to do, and the progress club members will be encouraged to make, with practical action plans for how the club is going to get there. So, get to it. ❖

# “The motors are coming”, he cried!

**Vaughan Allan** 2003/5

IN THE AUG/SEPT *Priorities* column, Yves Bastien was lamenting the increasing popularity of motorized sailplanes and the resulting impact on gliding clubs. As I've owned and operated a motorized sailplane since 1992, I thought I would offer my opinion on the topic.

Motorglider owners are some of the most committed soaring pilots in Canada. After I got my glider I moved to a local airport and became an 'independent' soaring pilot. My decision to move was motivated by a number of factors: airfield quality, airspace constraints, better soaring opportunities, leisure time availability, and club politics. I've missed the camaraderie of the club atmosphere, but have enjoyed the rewarding soaring opportunities that the motorglider opened up. About 60% of new glider production is now motorized. You don't have to be clairvoyant to see where this is leading. I would recommend that the Canadian soaring community stop lamenting the increasing number of motorized sailplanes and starts thinking of how to better integrate them into the soaring movement.

Has your club been able to attract motorglider pilots? Does your club even have a motorglider membership category available? Some clubs in my area have successfully attracted a number of motorglider pilot members. While in other clubs, if a member purchases a motorglider, he is never seen again.

On the competition front, the rules could be examined with an eye to attracting more motorglider participation. A quick perusal of contest results show that, with the possible exception of the Open class, motorgliders are not competitive with their conventional sailplane kin. Despite this, most competition rules seem to be written with an aim to removing the perceived advantages of motorgliders.

The future looks like a continued increase in motorgliders with an ever-larger impact on the Canadian and world wide gliding scene. I think it's time to tackle this situation head on and prevent these pilots from 'going independent'. ❖

**Yves responds** Thanks to Vaughan for responding to my piece in *Priorities*. It's a challenge to consider complex thoughts in an adequate fashion in the limited space available. My aim was to highlight a few areas of concern. I was flabbergasted at the proportion of motorgliders now being produced and the implications for our club-centric sport. Vaughan highlights areas that we should all consider in our quest for improvement.



# Questions of club culture ... and the fear of reporting

Anon. 2006/3

GLIDING HAS INHERENT RISK – we are always a lot higher than we are willing to fall. We do try to minimize that risk through awareness, training, experience and, yes, some policing. But ultimately, flying at the recreational level will involve some degree of risk. There are just too many variables, the most significant being the pilot. Commercial aviation tries to minimize those risks, and does a good job – by invoking rules, technology, more training, multiple individuals using decision-making management techniques, and teams of other individuals to monitor the pilots. There has been talk of eliminating the pilots entirely with the use of technology – you all have heard the old joke about the pilots and the dog in the cockpit. The dog is there to bite the pilots if they touch a control (and the pilot's job is to feed the dog).

I believe much of recreational flying would lose appeal if it did not contain an element of risk. There is a subset of humankind that enjoys the challenge of confronting their mortality in sports such as flying, climbing, paragliding, kayaking, back-country skiing, etc. Sure, we all try to use skills, experience and technology to minimize the possibility that you will confront your Maker during a flight, but in the end, removing all risk would remove the challenge. Read a bit of sports psychology if you don't believe this is true. Secondly, individuals do make mistakes and they will continue to do so. And in recreational flying, it is the individual who must guard against future mistakes of the same sort. Not the system. Those who fail to gain experience end up paying the price (which can cost their club dearly also). There are two ways of gaining experience: personal experience or learning from the mistakes of others.

A recent event at my club generated a good incident report from the affected pilot. The key thought here is that individuals must feel their incident will be used in a positive fashion to improve the overall experience level of all pilots rather than as a stick to beat the individual submitting the report. As a club we must encourage the sharing of experiences as a learning tool rather than as a vehicle to police individuals. There have been past instances where pilots who tried to share their experiences were then sanctioned by some senior pilots rather than thanked for sharing their mistakes. This tends to inhibit their growth as better pilots and in some cases caused them to leave the sport entirely.

One thing that has struck me during my time with my club is that we expect too much from our students and early stage licensed pilots. We seem to expect them to be perfect. Of course they can't be. They are still learning and one hopes they will continue to learn throughout their flying careers. By its very nature, learning new skills may result in "incidents" and if the student/new pilot survives these incidents then they can add that to their store of experience and develop wisdom. Criticizing any mistake has a number of drawbacks:

- It slows student development. The best instructor one can hope for is someone who is willing to sit there and let the student or licensed pilot make mistakes and then guide them to understand how to correct the error without destroying their growing sense of confidence and accomplishment.
- Student licensing is delayed thus turning them off the sport. The "wait time" is too long and they go to another club or leave the sport entirely.
- The culture actually inhibits the development of safe pilots who admit mistakes, learn from them and pass their knowledge along to others in the hope others will not repeat their mistakes.

Again I feel strongly that it is the individual who must create a personal culture of safety for their flying. The only way to do this is through skills development and continual self-awareness. This is severely impeded if the club culture is not supportive. Even those students who may be low on self-awareness can be mentored and guided.

Incidents are not accidents. Incidents are good learning tools both for the pilot who is brave enough to admit they really aren't perfect pilots, and for the other club members here and elsewhere. Again, incidents are good. The pilot survived, no one got hurt, experience is gained and shared. Wisdom develops. A better pilot results. Read some aviation history of Canada's early days (or still today) in the sparsely settled areas. Some of the best pilots we have alive today, now flying 747s, came from surviving crashes, mishaps, pilot errors, equipment failures, and poor decisions about the weather. They developed really good decision-making skills and passed the knowledge along to us. ❖



# Promoting the sport

Peter Deane 2007/4

... WITH PROMOTION IN MIND, I recently had the chance to put 2T in a static display at the Half Moon Bay 'Dream Machines' air show at a San Francisco Bay area airport not too far from where I live.

From a demographics perspective, most interest was from power pilots looking to convert, and modelling folks thinking about trying the real thing. Some people had taken three or four rides in gliders and still hadn't taken the plunge (I worked hard on them in particular – talk about low hanging fruit!). The biggest crowd gathered while we put 2T back in the box. An amazing amount of curiosity – getting excitable young boys to help out by passing dolly straps through the fuselage, etc. was a lot of fun. We've got to hook the toddlers ...

At a local contest I saw a very good 'public awareness' DVD the club had put together focusing on training, and on kids in particular – with a big focus on Harold Gallagher teaching a 14 year old to fly, with clips of his first solo flights. This was very, very cool to watch ...

As I was watching, it occurred to me that in our attempts to make our sport look as dramatic as possible to maximize the 'coolness' factor (New Zealand Grand Prix, dramatic mountain flying, high skill level rock polishing, racing around in expensive cool-looking gliders), we have set the perception of "derring-do" that may actually work against us – most of the folks I talked to at the Dream Machines aviation show needed help daring to do something they'd dreamed about for years – these folks (especially spouses or parents) need to know that the risk in flying is well-managed and the training is safe enough that they wouldn't have to worry about their life partner or offspring (centre of every parent's entire existence) doing something that will leave them bereft in short order. One fellow had taken four rides already and hadn't taken a lesson yet. His wife was the one who needed persuading that it wasn't insanely dangerous, not him.

If you can imagine the leap of courage it takes to go cross-country the first time and then extrapolate back to believing you could actually fly an airplane to start with, I think the message we need to send starts to change a little. I was reminded of me when I was 16, flying model airplanes next to the local RAF gliding club, old creaky open cockpit tandem Slingsby gliders groaning up the winch; my thought was – "wow, they're brave – wonder if I'll ever be able to do that?" It was far outside the sense I had for my own capabilities. I had no clue what I was even capable of, and neither do many of the people who we are promoting soaring to.

We need to encourage people to fly – making it look too dramatic will keep many on the ground. *Seeing soaring not only as a thrilling experience but as an affirming growth experience for all* is something we haven't directly articulated and I feel we need to work on this. If our job is to help the sport grow we need to focus on the joy of flying and how we can get people in the air as cheaply and safely as possible. Low cost, benign aircraft for training, focus on the process of learning to fly, set in the context of higher performance as a destination. ❖

## Part 3

*This is no way  
to play the game!*

# President's notes

**Russ Flint** 1981/5

FOR PART OF THE SOARING COMMUNITY, contests and competition flying will always be an alien mystery. Each time we send a team to "the World Championships we hear the question, "Should we be putting so much of our energy and resources into this one event?" This is essentially the same question that is inevitably raised by some of the members of a club which is hosting a regional or national contest, and it really comes down to the question, "What is this doing for me or for my club?"

Now that the competition season is largely over for the year, we can perhaps look for some answers from the perspective of the people and clubs involved in the World Contest in Germany and our own Eastern and Western Regionals. (In all three competitions, incidentally, weather was a problem, and even some of the most avid competition pilots were heard to mumble, "Why do we bother?"")

The Eastern Regionals were held at the home site of the hosting club, while the Western Contest was held at an airfield 50 miles from the home club site. Even in the latter case, however, over 40% of the membership were either directly involved in the contest or were interested enough to drive out and see what was happening and to take part in flying some of the many 'Familiarization' flights given to visitors to the site. In both contests, the hands-on experience of crewing, flying, operating a start gate, timekeeping, or whatever, was rewarding for those who were able to participate for the whole contest; while the learning experience of attending weather briefings, watching a well-organized launch procedure, listening to an ad-hoc talk on a technical topic on a non-flying day, or just "being around" provided stimulation for anyone there. The opportunity of seeing a large aggregation of different types of sailplanes is one that does not often occur for the average club member, and for the aspiring cross-country pilot who is waiting for 7000 foot cloud bases to fly his Silver distance, it is an inspiration to see sailplanes arriving home from a 300 km triangle having set out with the cu at 3000 feet agl.

An unusual postscript to the Western Regionals is that two days after the finish of the contest, the owner/operator of the airport had located and bought a two-seat trainer, with the enthusiastic encouragement of his wife. Sufficient local interest was generated by the contest that this could possibly be the nucleus of a new club.

Concerns about the "negative" effects of these contests ranged from loss of club revenue to curtailment of club activities, to massive impacts on our insurance premiums next year. The host club of the Western Regionals in fact saw net income from the contest as a result of the familiarization flights given to the public, though of course student flying at the home club was curtailed due to the absence of the 2-33. The situation in the East may have had even less impact on students since the contest was at the home site. Unfortunately, there were some insurance claims as a result of the contest in the East, though the Western contest remained accident-free. What happens to our insurance premiums, of course, depends on how well the rest of us fly (and tie our aircraft down!) for the rest of the year! Perhaps the biggest "negative" I saw at the Western contest was the frustration of families hanging around waiting for their pilots to be told it was a "no-contest" day at 1:30 in the afternoon. (An item here for serious consideration by future contest organizers!)

Regarding the World Contest, there is certainly less opportunity for direct involvement of many of us, though again the contest experience is available not just to the four pilots, but also to their crews who, through their first hand accounts and slide shows at their own clubs are able to generate some of that interest, enthusiasm and motivation which Ian Oldaker wrote about recently (3/81 page 9). Our involvement enables us to keep a high profile as an important sport with the Federal (and Provincial) Government, a factor which in the past has enabled SAC to grow in ways which otherwise would not have been possible, or would have imposed considerable burdens on individuals or clubs.

Ian also wrote about 'Goals'. Whether one's goal is to attain that first half-hour soaring flight or the chance to compete against the world's best, a "goal" is an essential part of any sport. Although only a few can attain the highest goals, they must be there. The benefits go not just to those who attain them.



# BORINNGGG!

## “Platypus” 1984/5

WANDERING AROUND the British Gliding Association [AGM] exhibition, I bought an ancient *Sailplane & Gliding* with the results of the 1950 National Championships. Philip Wills knocked off the winner's prize as easily as he penned a page of prose, and gave me to think: why are competition reports of those days – long before even I did my Silver C – so fascinating, and competition reports today so incredibly tedious? (Since I write many competition reports myself I am as much to blame as anyone – if the wretched reporters are to blame at all). It is because competitions themselves are now becoming boring to anyone except the participants – and even to some of them, I suspect. When Philip Wills flew in his Weihe from Camphill to Boston (Lincs not Mass) and nearly made it back, landing with his big wings and tiny airbrakes amongst the stone walls in the little fields at the bottom of the valley, out-and-returns were virtually unheard of. It was something new, not just in contest flying, but in British gliding altogether. When Nick Goodhart declared Portmoak from Lasham in 1959 and made it, using streets, cu-nim, ridges, wave, indeed every source of lift except sea breeze, we all relived it vicariously – every club pilot learned from it and was inspired by it.

Competitions were where new parts of the country were traversed, new sources of lift explored and where we extended what was possible in the sport. Hence the competition reports were intrinsically interesting to anyone, regardless of whether he was competitively-minded. Now nothing new happens in the Championships – because the task setters and the organizers (people like me under my other hat) work manfully to prevent anything interesting from happening. If I stood up in front of the Nationals pilots and said, “Today's will be a really different and unusual task...”, there would be panic and rage and a lynching would be rapidly organized. Tow ropes would be put to novel use. Seven triangles all going through Husbands Bosworth with 80% finishers is what they want. It's the “Deadly Doctrine” of Moffat, and I was delighted to see Hans-Werner Grosse demolish it [at our AGM]. ❖

## *I'll speak to the affirmative for Platypus.* **Tony Burton**

Once a new competitor feels comfortable with himself in a contest, the tasks are usually “easy”, primarily as a result of recent task setting philosophy. Tasks only get hard when the forecast is wrong and the pilots are forced to do some real soaring along with their racing. The sailplane itself has ceased to be a prime factor in task setting ever since its improved penetration enabled the pilot to stop worrying about just getting to the next thermal and wonder instead if he should even bother with it. George Moffat, in his book on competitive flying, “*Winning on the Wind*”, argued for the banishment of all tasks that gave an edge to the lucky pilot (although he did recognize that a good pilot made his own luck). Tasks are now almost exclusively closed courses, shorter than the day's weather will allow. These tasks do not routinely test all the skills a soaring pilot is supposed to have. The end result has been dull, dull contests.

Confess now, all you top-tenners, when was the last time you started to listen really carefully when the task for the day was announced? When was the last time you started a task realizing that you would have to do your best just to finish, let alone gain 20 points on the guy above you? Admit it, you now consider a task (such as area distance or one of the more recently suggested novelties) in which really significant personal flight decisions are required, is an admission of failure on the part of the task selection committee. Our contests have been working on a baseline of 100% completion of triangles – right, task setters? As a result, contest flying technique now revolves entirely around “the saved second” to which Moffat devoted an entire chapter of his book. The “short” triangle task has become very clinical; one wins by coring the best thermals and tracking the commands of a Speed Director for less than four hours. Is that all that should really be required of the nation's best soaring pilots? The point Platypus makes is that there aren't too many keen club pilots who see a lot of glamour in that compared to the earlier contest days, and certainly can't identify with it. A point I wish to stress is that arguers for increased general interest and support of competition tend to emphasize the equipment that competition has placed in Everyman's hand, not soaring technique which is more generally relevant. I suggest that is because very little evolution of soaring technique now comes out of contest flying. Competition is in a rut which only a change in philosophy will lift it out of. Unfortunately, it is not in the interest of the competitor to change anything because the present rules and tasks are undemanding of the fullest range of soaring knowledge and skills and minimize scoring risk.

Have you ever read or heard how uninspiring the “how I won the day” stories have become? At Virden, some consisted of less than a single grammatically complete English sentence. Maybe that's one reason I find it so difficult to pry stories out of top competitors – they truly have nothing special to say! The best stories in contests come from those in the bottom half of the list, those pilots who missed the “optimal” start time, the “optimal” course line, or the “optimal” final glide. It is the “how I lost the day but got back anyway” tales that most non-contest pilots would enjoy and learn most from.

Maybe it's time for the Sporting Committee to add more challenging tasks to the rule book, or for task setters to be more demanding of pilots under the present rules. Maybe it's time for contest pilots to prove that the best of them do make their own luck. Maybe non-contest pilots would greet the competitive soaring idea less unfavourably if they thought entry wasn't limited only to applied mathematicians. Maybe then contests can get interesting for everyone again. ❖

# Competition? Nay

**Brian Hollington** 1984/5

I ALWAYS ENJOY my *free flight*, but I must admit that it seldom arouses any strong emotions in my rather placid soul. So, it was with some surprise that I found myself intensely annoyed by two sections of your last edition: “Musings” by Bob Carlson and Al Poldaa’s comments as the new chairman of the Sporting committee.

In both cases the writer suggests that the ordinary club member “owes it to the sport” to get out there and compete, and that (in the case of “Musings”) any effort to civilize the surroundings of the clubhouse for the two-thirds of the membership left on the ground, or to introduce the sport to a wider public in some way, detracts from the Holy Grail hunt for bigger and faster triangles. Where, they demand, would we be without competition and its fibreglass goodies? Well, probably in much the same place, I think. The desire to do better and own something new is a very ordinary human characteristic and not notably spurred by organized racing. Non-racing sailboat skippers spend just as much time fine-tuning their craft as most weekend racers. Future developments might be slowed if competition were to cease, but they would arrive in time nonetheless. We stopped jumping off the hillsides long before the organized racing we know today.

Germany has 40,000 glider pilots, the USA around 20,000, Britain 9000, and Canada 1700. Is Schempp-Hirth really holding a decision on the Ventus or Discus production runs until they see if the VSA is going to hold a competition this year? Bob wonders why there has been so much criticism of contest pilots over the years. Well, some of it has no doubt been voiced by pilots chased out of areas of prime lift by the head-on approach of an expert with contest-honed nerves of steel. Many of us do not like to fly up the nostrils of our fellow pilots without a very good reason. I find it difficult to view this attitude as other than sensible. Furthermore, since there is no additional insurance premium required of competition ships, the rest of us are already supporting this aspect of the sport. There are definite risks associated with soaring contests.

During the last month, the VSA has flown about 150 guests, most of whom had never seen a glider before. This was done with a great deal of work by most of the members, and a considerable sacrifice of gliding time by all of them. Sorry, I feel that we have done far more for the sport than if six or seven of us had spent a day with our heart in our mouth, chasing each other around some highly unsuitable territory. No, I know that contest flying is no holiday. Yes, I am quite content to see SAC support those with the skills and dedication to compete. Yes, I am even ready to pick up my piece of their insurance risk. I wish them every success. Just do not tell me that I owe it to Otto Lilienthal to get out there and join them.

Sincerely (though fuming)

*Thanks for the opinion, Brian – one point of order, though – no additional insurance premium is required of competition ships here because there is no additional risk to the underwriter. As our Insurance Committee has tried to emphasize many times, it is the club ships that have exacted more claims in the recent past. Editor*

## **Bob Carlson (SAC president) responds:**

Dear Brian, I am pleased that you wrote. I’m sorry that my writing roused your ire so high. It’s nice to be read, regrettably it appears that I did not communicate my point too well. Allow me to try again please.

What I tried to say was that, to me, the purpose of our sport has flagged and with it our membership. I’ve tried to step back a little and look at our activities from the position of the novice, the uninitiated. What I see is people standing around looking at aeroplanes making seemingly aimless circles in the sky. To those who have never flown, much less never flown in a sailplane, it doesn’t look very interesting or even exciting. So what’s the purpose? – the sideline BBQs and swimming pools are in many backyards these days – gliding clubs aren’t needed for that. That’s my point – what is our purpose? I feel that competition (and I described five modes, not just one) is the purpose we need to demonstrate, to excite, to give the uninitiated reason to join our clubs, learn to fly and enjoy. There are lots of “thrill” sports to attract the uncommitted – sailboats, wind surfing, hang gliders and ultralights, to name just four. All offer obvious publicized skill and accomplishment rewards. To the uninitiated we are mystic about our real challenges, skills and accomplishments.

I’m sorry, Brian, that you focused only on one of the modes of competition that I described. We need members. In my view a strong demonstrated competitive spirit and activity expressed in any or all of these modes will help a lot. Show them the delights of ridge, thermal and wave flying. Above all show them how to use these tools to earn badges, set records, even race.



# a “Gliding Ethic”

Justin Wills 1986/5

I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU a personal view on the role and responsibility of the performance pilot in the development of gliding. I want to start by suggesting the adoption of a “Gliding Ethic”. The Ethic I would like to propose is as follows: *“A responsibility to uphold the freedom whereby enthusiasts from any walk of life can explore the ocean of the air howsoever and wheresoever they choose, with the minimum of constraints other than those imposed by the laws of nature.”* Underlying this ethic is a belief in the intrinsic value of the sport and that it enriches the lives of those who participate in it.

Performance flying, be it for badges, records, or competitions, is the most publicized part of gliding and thus, should bear its full share of this responsibility. However, trends in performance flying are showing signs of running contrary to this ethic. I have grounds for concern: the one I wish to discuss now is the introduction last year of the new FAI rules permitting flights using multiple turnpoints to qualify for badge and distance diploma flights. I am not alone in this concern, and I would like to read you excerpts from a letter printed in the February issue of Soaring magazine:

“Once upon a time, flying a sailplane cross-country was a horizon-expanding experience. But all that is changing. The latest revision to the FAI Sporting Code drastically reduces the minimum distance a pilot has to fly from his home base to complete the distance requirements for Gold, Diamond, and 1000 km badge legs. And while there was jubilation in the clubhouse at the prospect of completing Diamond distance without risking even a 100-mile retrieve, I was caused to wonder if the challenges of soaring cross-country are not being overdiluted.

“Twenty-five years ago, flying Skylark 3s with an average cross-country speed of 25-35 mph, we attempted Gold and Diamond distance. Landing out was often a foregone conclusion, as was a lengthy retrieve ... Now we fly glass beauties with cross-country speeds twice that, yet our globe-trotting has become restricted to a much narrower region. Diamond distance can be achieved by zipping up and down a mini-course to points only 52 miles from the centre. Meanwhile, our dinky little computers are telling us how fast to fly, how high to climb, etc., after we’ve punched in our data on the flightline. Are we becoming a bunch of armchair pilots? Have the demands for comfort and convenience taken over the soaring movement? If so, where will it end – in the total simulation of the cross-country experience?

“I’m not at all sure that we’re not going too far. My guess is that I shall never again open the canopy and ask the farmer, ‘What state is this?’ Or set up my approach in the last glimmer of gloaming. Of course, I could do these things, but if the rules say I don’t have to, chances are, I won’t. I question whether a 52-mile return ticket excursion is worthy of that prized Diamond in the pin. What should we aim for – absolute fairness and ultimate safety? Or tasks that challenge the pilot to make creative decisions and extend him to the limit – even at some risk?”

I agree with the sentiments expressed, and I believe that the reasoning behind this change is not only mistaken, but runs contrary to the gliding ethic.

- The first reason advanced is that this change enables such flights to be performed in countries where geographical limitations rendered them impossible under the previous rules. However, this reason is based on the fallacy that there is an equality between the achievement of a given task in different countries, in fact, we are all perfectly aware that the achievement of say, a 750 km triangle in Australia is far easier than a similar flight in the UK, and that in Denmark it may be impossible. That hasn’t prevented a Dane from being a recent World Champion! What the previous rules did provide was an acceptably consistent measure of achievement within the country concerned. A change in the rules will destroy this, whilst making such flights perhaps ludicrously easy in Australia.
- The second reason advanced is one of safety. At this point, I would simply state that a skilled pilot must be capable of meeting the demands of the laws of nature, and attempts to insulate him from such demands are not only contrary to the gliding ethic, but could also be counterproductive.
- The third reason is one of convenience. This is unarguable if you accept that the length of retrieve determines its inconvenience. I don’t, but realize this is a subjective view.

However, surely it is ludicrous to devalue the achievement of long established standards at a time that has seen enormous improvements in glider performance. Furthermore, in Britain we have been particularly fortunate that the ultimate badge requirement has always provided a tremendous challenge. Surely there is no case to alter the basis of these achievements and aspirations. And, if this were not reason enough, even more important is the likely effect on the future of gliding. Once it is generally perceived that the ultimate goals of performance flying can be fulfilled within a corridor 50-90 miles either side of the base airfield, we will lose not only the interest of the public but also a crucial argument in our efforts to keep reasonable amounts of free airspace available for our sport. In other words, acceptance of these rules runs contrary to the gliding ethic. I feel strongly that the BGA should not recognize claims for flights submitted under the new rules. Let such flights be seen for what they are – an interesting way to spend a day, perhaps competing with others, when the weather precludes flying over a wider geographical area. ❖



# What comes after the Diamond & 1000 km?

*A history of the FAI badges and the need for change*

**Bertha Ryan, Bernald Smith, & Carl Herold 1987/4**

OTTO LILIENTHAL, the Wright Brothers and others pioneered the very beginnings of the sport we all love so much. For a while, the basic effort of creating a craft that could even briefly maintain itself in the air was enough. But then, pilots needed goals to measure their personal accomplishments and the original A, B, and C badges were established for one minute duration with an "S" turn, 360° turns, and a five minute duration (the latter being 38% of the existing world record of 13 minutes at the time). In the years that followed, pilots left the ridges to try thermal soaring for distance. The A, B, and C badges were no longer sufficient to measure accomplishment. So, in 1932, the Silver Badge was established. The five-hour duration (24% of the existing 21-hour duration record) was selected to prove the soaring pilot really could stay up for an extended period. The 50 km distance requirement (23% of the existing 137 mile distance record) made it necessary for the pilot to break away from his takeoff site and go cross-country. The 1000 metre altitude gain (38% of the existing altitude record) required thermal soaring rather than slope soaring.

But accomplishments came fast and the Gold badge was introduced in 1935, requiring achievements of an even higher percentage of the existing records. In addition to the Silver duration requirement, the pilot now had to gain 3000 metres altitude (70% of the world record at the time). This meant cloud flying was necessary (at least in Europe). The distance leg of 300 km (60% of the world record) showed that the pilot had mastered himself and his craft.

All of these achievement measures came prior to World War II. Soaring had advanced from the mere, but significant, accomplishment of flight itself to a remarkable distance record of 465 miles and altitudes over 22,000 feet. Post-World War II soaring was, at first, merely a continuation of the pre-war accomplishments. The pre-war sailplane glide ratios ranged from 16 to 26. The 1939 distance record of 465 miles was finally broken in 1951 with a flight of 535 miles made in a sailplane of approximately 40:1 L/D.

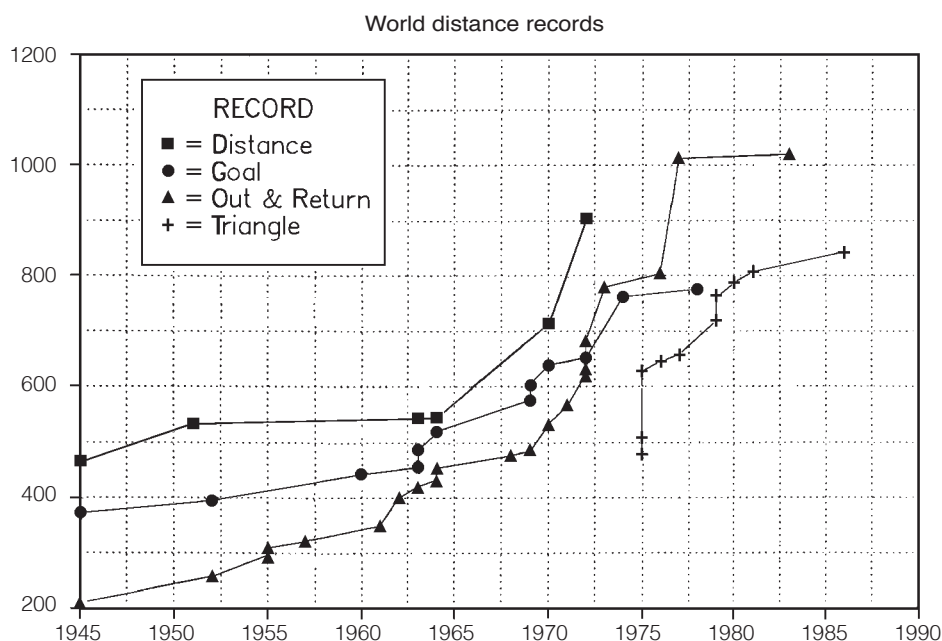
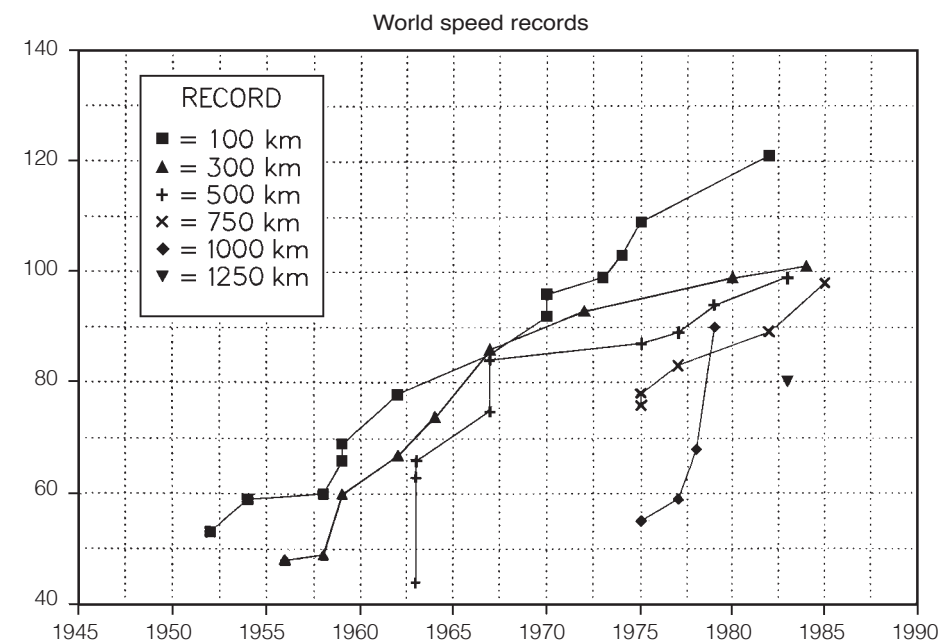
But the records measure the possibilities: the badges test the skills and achievements of the individual pilot. It was time for another soaring badge. The Diamond badge came in 1949 and required an altitude gain of 5000 metres (normally attainable through wave flying, usually requiring oxygen usage), a goal flight of 300 km (requiring advanced planning and knowledge of meteorological conditions) and a distance flight of 500 km (possibly requiring the pilot to fly in different air masses during the one flight). The altitude was 73%, the distance 67%, and the goal 50% of the world records at the time.

At last, interest in soaring was changing from merely staying up to going someplace. Then, as glass ships came on the scene, it became important to get there fast – not just for speed, but for more distance in the available soaring day. Duration records were dropped in 1955 and the 200 and 300 km speed records added as record categories.

The speed and distance world records from 1945 are shown in Figures 1 and 2. There were 500 Diamond pilots worldwide in 1966, the distance record was over 647 miles, the speed record 78 mph, and the absolute altitude record over 46,000 feet. By 1986, there were 4000 Diamond pilots worldwide, the longest distance flown was 1023 miles, the fastest speed 121 mph, and the highest altitude achieved 49,009 feet. The sailplane distance record increased 39% in the first 20 years following World War II and 58% in the next 20 years. Speed records did not even exist until the early 50s and more than doubled between 1952 and 1982. What accounts for these large increases? Composite materials: first glass, then carbon, allowed smaller airfoil thicknesses, increased maximum lift coefficients, reduced profile drag, higher strength to weight ratios. The increasing trends of performance parameters such as aspect ratio, wing loading, and max L/D show no sign of levelling off. A new generation of high efficiency sailplanes has been produced having disposable ballast systems which are a high percentage of the gross weight.

The 1965 World Championships were won by a Foka-4 and Edelweiss, the last time the World Championships were won by wood sailplanes. By 1964, the Wortmann airfoils were being used in new designs. The first Libelle H-301 arrived in the USA in September, 1965. The Phoebus, an outgrowth of the early glass sailplane, the Phoenix, arrived in 1966. That year, one-third of the sailplanes in the German national competition were glass with Wortmann or Eppler airfoils. By 1967, 23 of the 73 sailplanes in the US Nationals were glass. In 1968, the K-8B set the last single place world record made in a wood/fabric sailplane. The era of glass/carbon composites had begun. Soaring had changed.

But what about badges and awards to measure individual pilot performance? Records, by their nature, show the possibilities. The FAI has recognized these advancements by establishing the additional speed and distance record categories. But little attention has been paid to the goals of the individual pilot. The last badge was established in



1949, 38 years ago, when practical composite sailplanes were just a designer's dream. The 1000 km Diploma was instituted in 1973 when there were over 1000 Diamond pilots worldwide. It was 68% of the 908 mile distance record made the previous year. Seventy 1000 km Diplomas had been earned in the USA alone by the end of 1986 (more than all the U.S. Diamond pilots 20 years earlier).

It has been recognized for many years that some kind of new measure of achievement for the individual pilot is needed. In 1953 the SSA Directors proposed a Plutonium Badge Award, but nothing came of it. The subject came up again in 1970 when a possible Platinum Badge was discussed – one in which the required accomplishments are tied to existing records. No badge resulted from this discussion, but the 1000 km Diploma was initiated in 1973. The whole concept of soaring changed since the Diamond badge was introduced. It has gone from distance flying to closed course speed flying. There has been recognition of these changes in records, but not in the badges. It appears the few record-seekers have much to challenge them but badge seekers, the majority of pilots, have no new badge to challenge their ability to use current soaring technology and practices to their utmost.

The authors of this article presented, at the recent OSTIV meeting in Australia, a paper in which the history of soaring in relation to the badges, records, and sailplane performance was discussed. We believe this paper established without doubt the need for a new FAI badge/award which could be any one of the following (or something else):

- A redefinition of the existing badges,
- Speed as a 4th Diamond,
- New awards (eg, Diplome for speed, a new badge as an extension of current badges, or a 'living' badge as percentage of recent records),
- Levels of achievement for the Diamond badge in the form of increased distances,
- Annual national awards for speed and out and return,
- Badge or award measuring cumulative accomplishments, etc.

Now we need your ideas and comments. Do you believe the time has come for FAI to establish a new badge/award? If so, what do you think it should be? The SSA has appointed the three authors of this article to look into the matter and report to the SSA Directors. The CIVV has also appointed a similar committee composed of representatives from New Zealand, Sweden, West Germany, the USSR, and the USA. You are the people who will use the new badge. Please send your comments to the authors of this paper, in writing or in person, to our home addresses or via SSA. We need to know if there is enough interest for us to continue with the effort to establish a new soaring badge/award and we need to know your ideas as to what it should be.

# Competition objectives

This unofficial paper/opinion was submitted by request to a special CIVV committee established to study the current philosophy and state of world soaring competition.

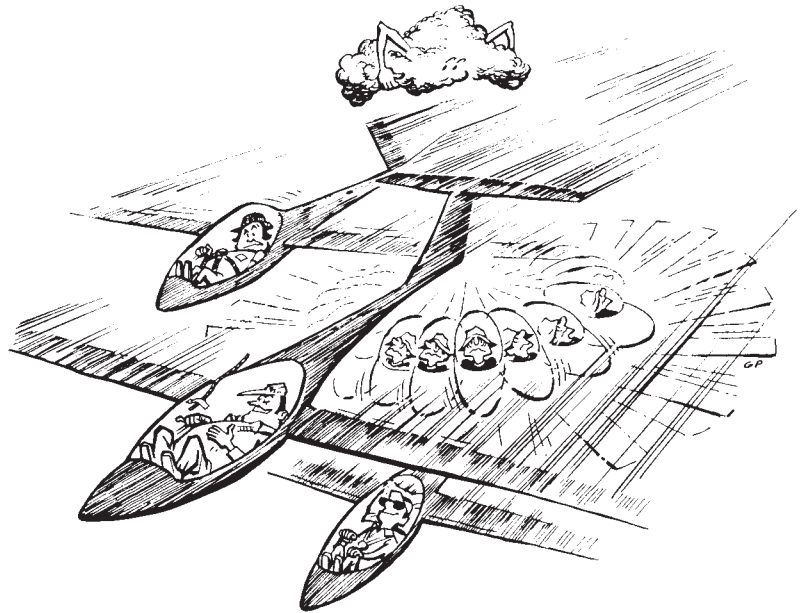
Jim Oke 1988/1

THE UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF COMPETITION in any sport seems to be to identify the more successful practitioners of the sport in order that they may be suitably recognized. The desire for recognition of one's skills and abilities is a healthy human instinct which has evolved through the ages and needs little further discussion. From a collective viewpoint, it is useful for a sporting group to identify those who possess superior techniques, methods, or equipment so that these factors can be investigated, understood, and publicized in order to advance the sport as a whole. To the individual, recognition in some sports may bring with it considerable attention from the public at large and thus significant material benefits (as seen by hockey stars in Canada and soccer stars in Europe). The former aspect seems vastly more important to gliding than the latter. The development of modern composite construction sailplanes, instrument systems, and flying techniques under the incentive of success in competition has clearly done much to advance the pleasure and challenge of recreational gliding through the development of better equipment and flying techniques. Few glider pilots have won much public fame or fortune, however!

The notion of competitive gliding is probably based on the assumption of a positive correlation existing between a given flight performance and the possession of certain qualities that glider pilots would identify as desirable. Agreement on what qualities make a good pilot is probably necessary before a competition test can be designed. A corollary that follows is that such qualities are likely to be possessed in the greatest quantity by the "best" pilot. The following areas might be considered to be a partial list of the qualities that ought to be tested in a gliding competition:

- aircraft handling skills
- technical or scientific knowledge of aerodynamics and meteorology
- the ability to apply such knowledge in practical situations
- general airmanship (flight planning, navigation and map-reading, risk management)
- mental and physical stamina (the ability to exercise the above skills for extended periods of time)

Certain qualities are clearly held to be undesirable traits in a glider pilot and should be discouraged where possible; for instance, a willingness to take foolish and unnecessary risks should be discouraged and not made an asset in competition. Also qualities such as physical stamina must be tested carefully to avoid the creation of possibly dangerous situations. It is unlikely that all qualities are likely to be equal in importance and some weighting factor or priority must be attached to each quality to determine its place in the competition test.



When a list of qualities is decided upon, the competition task (or tasks) should then be designed to test these qualities in a manner that is independent of the sailplane being flown and the weather encountered during a competition. Currently the former requirement is addressed by the definition of various sailplane classes within which sailplane performance is assumed to be equal. Weather effects are theoretically removed by scoring systems and multi-day contests that should cause weather effects to average out for all competitors. Another point is that gliding is essentially a solo sport and does not normally involve interaction with other competitors in a direct manner (the contrast being the same as that between golf and tennis). In practice, all competitors fly in the same airspace at the same time, thus some interaction is inevitable. The competition should be arranged to minimize the effects of interaction on individual competitors as much as possible.

Implicit in any discussion of gliding is the concept of efficient use of energy drawn from the atmosphere. For competition purposes, all pilots should be presumed to have access to equal amounts of energy present in the atmosphere with the winning or most successful pilot being the one who can translate this energy into either the longest or fastest glider flight. It is a perception held at present by some glider pilots that modern gliding competitions, which concentrate almost exclusively on closed course speed tasks, do not assess a broad enough spectrum of pilot qualities or at least do not assess them adequately.

Specifically:

- the point system forces attention to other pilot's performances in selecting flight strategy.
- the use of a defined course reduces but doesn't eliminate local weather influences, at the cost of reducing the assessment of weather judgement of individual pilots.
- the strong emphasis on task completions (caused by the speed versus distance point balance) leads to short tasks at high speeds in strong conditions, which likely drives sailplane development in a direction which is possibly not in the best interests of gliding as a whole.

If the current competition task is to fly a given distance in the minimum time under the prevailing conditions, then the opposite end of the spectrum would be represented by free distance or flying the maximum distance possible with unlimited time.

An alternative task would be to fly the maximum distance possible in a given time which again implies optimizing speed although with greater pilot flexibility. The concept would be to set a time interval (perhaps three or four hours) and allow pilots to select a start time of their choice with the task of flying as great a distance as they are able (using defined turnpoints, etc.) during the set time. A pilot would be scored on the basis of cumulative distance flown during the competition or by a point system applying to each day. Flight distance would be assessed as the sum of the completed legs flown before time was up, with the last leg prorated according to the speed achieved on the leg falling about the end of the time interval. Alternatively, a sailplane's location at the end of the time interval could be recorded automatically by some electronic device. The pilot would have the option of returning to the base airfield after the set time interval was completed. However, an optimum flight would clearly most often end with an off-field landing at the extreme downwind edge of the flight area, which would not be a desirable result for organizational reasons. Offering a point bonus for a landing at the base airfield is a possibility, but could result in skewing of scores for insufficient reason. The advantages of such a competition would be in:

- forcing pilots to demonstrate greater weather assessment and judgement than that needed to fly a defined course,
- removing or minimizing consideration of other pilots' actions while flying the task, and yet,
- providing a unique challenge to each pilot. ♦

**Postscript (2008):** *Since the time Jim wrote this, the IGC (then the CIVV) has moved towards a couple of his points, mainly thanks to the use of flight recorders: the need for fast, low finishes has been written out of the rules, the Assigned Area (AAT) task has the goal of "fly the maximum distance possible in a given time", and Regional contests in the USA award some extra points for outlandings on airfields. Tony*

# On-board nav equipment discourages competition

Ian Grant 1993/2

I UNDERSTAND that the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) is rescinding its long-standing ban on navigation equipment. This decision will allow use of the US military Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites. The FAI's rationale is obscure. After all, VOR/DME nav aids have offered area navigation functions for many years. Yet I fear its policy change will harm the sport, and add thousands of dollars to its costs. GPS units can display the bearing and range to any point. Such an instrument will let a pilot navigate round a course without referring to the ground. In so doing it more or less eliminates traditional problems and the skills for dealing with them – getting lost, finding turnpoints, and pinpointing landing fields in rough terrain. The edge it gives is going to ensure its use by competitive types. Those who can't afford it will find themselves at a disadvantage.

Allowing this situation is worse than unfair. The FAI's decision is symptomatic of a push for technology and performance at all costs that is taking competitive soaring further and further from its amateur roots. It is at odds with the motives of the World Class glider design contest. Established pilots can perhaps live with it, but many beginners, especially the younger ones, may be further discouraged. Nav aids may well have a place in the Open Class. I believe they should be kept out of at least one of the other Classes. If you want to make it easy, get an engine! ♦



## Technology and competition not a problem

Jim Oke 1993/3

I would like to comment on the letters by Ian Grant and Len Gelfand in the last issue. Ian Grant's worries about allowing GPS navigation equipment be used during FAI sanctioned gliding competitions seem overstated. For instance, the FAI rules have never forbidden the use of electronic navigation aids during badge or record flights, but I have heard only of a few instances of such aids being used during record attempts despite the many advantages that Ian claims for GPS and similar devices.

It is not obvious what advantage there is for a glider pilot to be able to consult a very precise lat/long position read-out in flight. Clouds and thermals hardly stay fixed in place and thus GPS cannot be any help in interpreting or using the weather as such. Locating hard-to-find landing fields in otherwise unlandable areas is one possible use, but glider pilots rarely encounter such fierce terrain even during contests. Besides, who would really depend solely on GPS to blindly glide to a small field in the middle of a forest?



Simply staring at a nav display in the cockpit to avoid getting lost seems to be more of a disadvantage than looking outside and staying alert for visual clues to the weather and so on.

On the other hand, there are definite advantages to using GPS and a data recording device to record and verify a pilot's flight performance. Trials have proven that GPS data can replace often controversial turn-point photography, and the old rule that worried about the pilot sneaking out to the first turnpoint before the start is no longer needed. Providing a continuous record of a sailplane's position during a flight is the surest check against a pilot entering restricted airspace which is a significant problem in countries with a more crowded airspace situation than Canadian pilots enjoy. In addition to competition use, a combination GPS/electronic barograph can provide the ultimate in post-flight analysis and interpretation for any pilot interested in improving his or her performance through study of the track flown and thermals used.

As far as the cost argument goes, a GPS/data recorder combination is available at a fraction of the cost of the "distance flown" computers already in use by many contest pilots and about which the FAI rules are quite silent. Electronic barograph devices have been more than cost competitive with the better traditional instruments for some time now. A long time ago, there may have been a "rich man" advantage to be had by supplying one's own radio direction finding team to follow you around the course and help out if you got lost. Thus the old "no navigation assistance" rule. However, GPS and Loran signals are equally available to all and exploitable at low cost so why ignore the potential benefits to be had simply to be seen to sidestepping technology. This is one case where comparatively low cost technology can be our friend.

I find Len Gelfand's statement to the effect that "competition has been more harmful than helpful in getting more people into our sport (gliding)" rather surprising (Letters & Opinions – *free flight* 2/93). Only by taking a very narrow view of the cost/benefit ratio of modern gliders compared to those of the fifties can such an opinion be supported.

By way of explanation, I would recall two fellow club members who some years ago owned a homebuilt Miller Tern. Now the Tern, although perhaps a worthy aircraft in its day, must surely be the epitome of the low-tech, presumably low-cost, approach to soaring. What I remember most about the aircraft though was the amount of time and work that went into maintaining and fixing that particular Tern. Spring, summer and fall, I watched my friends tinker instead of fly. The thing was a bear to derig, of course, so it sat exposed to the elements six months of the year which didn't help. Then one day, the two partners sold the Tern and acquired a Standard Astir, one of the more modest fibreglass ships around. By the end of their first season they were sold: as one of them put it "I still can't believe it, all you do is put it together and fly, no more tinkering!"

Now I have no reason to dispute Len's point that there is little if any technology transfer from the race track to the car in the average family's driveway. However, I would submit that modern composite construction sailplanes would not exist if it had not been for sailplane competition. This includes gliders such as the Standard Astir which have probably never seen much competition use, but instead have provided hours of safe, enjoyable flying to club pilots. Note that most of the World class sailplane entries employ composite construction techniques and aerodynamic features that appear to have been largely, if not entirely, developed for competition sailplanes. Even the classic Ka6 design, much beloved by gliding traditionalists, was prompted by a competition glider design exercise.

The pursuit of low cost gliding should not blind us to the other side of the cost/benefit equation. A return to the Ka6/K7 era with fragile gliders requiring lots of ongoing maintenance will not necessarily pay the expected benefits of increased participation in the sport once after-purchase costs and time requirements are figured in. (In fact, the amount of skilled labour in a Ka6 wing would probably make the Ka6 unaffordable to produce today.)

Lacking any other obvious impetus for sailplane designers to pursue composite construction and advanced aerodynamics, perhaps glider pilots owe a larger vote of thanks to the gliding competition community for the existence of today's modern sailplane than Len seems willing to acknowledge. ❖



# the Nationals and the Sports class

## a modest proposal for improving both

**Tony Burton** 1994/5

AT THE 1994 NATIONALS AT SOSA I did a little lobbying (to no avail by the way), trying to convince a few pilots to fly Sports class to keep it going from its good start at Swift Current last year. I believe there is the potential to significantly improve the competitive environment at our Nationals. My off-the-cuff arguments at the contest did not win the day; perhaps the somewhat more reasoned thoughts here will convert some souls to my proposition.

I think two obstacles lie in the way of getting a solid competition going in this class: its name and its past history. First of all, the Sports class name has an image problem. It has the connotation of only being a fun, “not-for-serious-pilots-with-proper-soaring-machines” contest – sort of uncool for “real” Nationals competitors like you and me. It needs to be given a neutral name which describes simply what the class does, and “Handicapped class” is as good as any.

Secondly, the short history of this class has indeed seen many beginning contest pilots using it as an entry level to competition. In fact, adding a third class was a means of increasing participation in the Nationals because the current low number of competition pilots in Canada requires all skill levels to be signed up for a contest to be financially sustainable. New competitors are being thrown into the water to learn to swim, and there are certainly safer and better ways to train. The first-time competitor really shouldn't be at a Nationals, for this pilot it is a bit intimidating, and certainly there is no additional competition being provided to test the pros.

The problem is beginning to be solved by more provincial contests, more well organized cross-country weeks at clubs, a province-wide season “Ladder” competition in Ontario, and by new contests specifically directed to the novice such as the last two “Un-Nationals” run by eastern clubs. If this class is recognized for what it should be – a top competition between people rather than equipment, then it will grow in popularity and in the willingness of pilots to fly this class in our contests rather than stick to 15m or Standard. I therefore suggest that there is no overriding reason why our national competition requires the separation of the two FAI classes (the Open class now being quite moribund):

- The Canadian team is selected from the top names on the Canadian seeding list which is generated from the competitive results of pilots from both classes, and these pilots may choose in turn in what class they wish to fly in a Worlds. (Being named to the team and actually being able to afford the tab and accept is a separate problem.)
- Given that task committees have recently been setting the same course for both classes on a given day, there is no reason why they shouldn't continue and the pilots all be scored together provided the relatively small performance difference between the ships is adjusted by their handicap factors.
- Since racing skills are improved by strong competition (that's why many of our pilots compete in American contests occasionally), combining the classes into a Handicapped class effectively doubles the number of pilots who are capable of beating you. Surely there is more competitive significance to being the winner of a 25 man contest rather than an 11 or 14 man field as occurred this year.
- A larger field largely eliminates the “funny” scores that now occur in every contest as a result of day devaluation factors applied to a short list of competitors.

What arguments might there be against the idea?

- *A pilot could move up to the Canadian team squad flying an older uncompetitive ship.*  
Great – the best pilots are not all rich and can afford top of the line ships. Perhaps we have missed a

few who would have done well for Canada in past Worlds. In any case, team pilots have always had trouble finding the money to compete and ships to rent in a Worlds, and the new ships are, if anything, easier to transition to and fly than the older ones.

- *Handicapping doesn't work and nobody really trusts that the values are accurate.*  
It's true that handicapping is open to argument and presumes flight under a set of soaring conditions that aren't there during the contest. It doesn't work when applied to a large range of sailplane performance – no matter how accurate the handicap is for a I-26, on a windy day it will be on the ground while the Discus has already checked out three thermals. Handicaps do work acceptably well over a narrow range of values on reasonable soaring days, and today most Standard and I5m ships have handicaps within less than 8% of each other.

On weak soaring days, sailplane performance differences are far less important – a pilot's ability to just stay airborne is paramount. In this case handicap values tend to penalize the scores of hot ships, so a narrower set of values must be applied. One way to do this would be to adjust handicaps to a narrower range of values according to the average speed at which a task is completed. The point I wish to stress here is that handicapping can be used within a narrow range of ship performance with a probable error a lot less than the range of soaring errors any pilot will make on a given day. Further study is required but the problem is not so serious as to make suspect a Nationals winner.

- *From a recognition point of view, we cut the number of contest "winners" in half.*  
It is a pity that gliding has had a "if you are not first, you get nothing" national award process. With the number of tasks the pilots compete in, one more day often changes the winner. If Nationals were flown in one Handicapped class the current trophies for Open, I5m, and Standard winners could instead be awarded to first, second, and third place to increase the current level of peer recognition.
- *If there was only one class, tasks would be watered down.*  
It is important that appropriate task setting is not compromised in a Handicapped class under the current scoring formulas – tasks should be matched to the skills of the top half of the field flying a I.0 handicapped sailplane. Although a few lower performance ships may be present, they should not affect the task setting. If some such accommodation were contemplated, then the rules would have to be changed to use the "scratch" distance PST tasks used in US Sports class competition for example (a pilot's minimum distance to fly is the scratch distance set for the day times the sailplane handicap).

In conclusion, there's always resistance to change, but that shouldn't mask the fact that the system is in need of change anyway, given the current rather sickly state of our competitive environment in Canada. A single Handicapped class would improve competition and more effectively select our best pilots. Perhaps the germ of acceptance in scoring the skills of a large field of *pilots* rather than two smaller groups of *equipment* lies in the competitive exhilaration one feels on getting a higher score on a task than say, Jörg Stieber – you would never say to yourself, "I beat an LS-6 today" – you do say, "I beat Jörg!" ❖

**Postscript (2008):** *Canadian competition has indeed embraced a Handicapped class, although the reason – not enough competitors to score a single FAI class – is a sad commentary on the decreasing numbers of competition-level pilots available in our smaller association.*

*The other interesting point to note is that handicapped competitions do indeed have a lot of credibility now, as USA numbers indicate. Top pilots flying are entering US Regional and National events in numbers that are very often greater than in the FAI class competitions. The only thing I don't like about it is that all sailplanes are allowed, with the consequent biases of a too-large range of handicaps. European competitions do limit the handicap range allowed. Tony*

# Technology and the nature of sport

**Richard Carr** 1995/4

THE EAGER ACCEPTANCE of GPS and the lack of discussion on its implications has been giving me an uneasy feeling for some time, like a lump in my parachute on a long flight. I finally realized that the problem wasn't GPS, but the slow erosion of the significance of the pilot that bothers me. This erosion may be desirable in mundane practical pursuits, but it is the antithesis of sport. Yes, this is a resurrection of the long-standing arguments about the trade-off of progress against the purity of sport. The debate is neither new nor unique to soaring, but it's been strangely absent in this headlong rush to adopt GPS. Such a debate is a necessary part of any sport grappling with change. But if there's been a debate about GPS, I've missed it. Instead, we are presented with the marketing view: all the advantages, with no meaningful dialogue about the potential disadvantages. Now, it's hard to argue against using GPS for flight verification. But to the extent that it replaces a valuable piloting skills, we should view it as a harbinger of future clashes between automation and our sport.

My view of new technology in the cockpit is fatalistic. On one hand, I believe that access to more data detracts from, rather than enhances, the soaring experience. Oh, I'm sure one can fly faster and maybe safer, but not more enjoyably. On the other hand, a glider pilot would be foolish to ignore the advantages that can be obtained so cheaply, and because of that, gadget proliferation is inevitable. Suppose an ad appears next month for a \$100 instrument that tells you not only where all the lift is within gliding distance, but how strong it'll be when you get to it, and this instrument really works as advertised. Instantly, cross-country speeds would go up 10 knots or more and landouts would go the way of the dial telephone. Would the soaring be more fun? I don't think so. Would I buy one? Of course, as would any soaring pilot with \$100 to his name. Such is the dilemma and sweet seduction of technology.

One of the main rewards of cross-country soaring is succeeding in the face of uncertainty. When the outcome of the undertaking is in doubt to the very end, the reward is sweetest. More data and technological aid reduces uncertainty, makes fewer demands on skill and self-reliance, and diminishes the achievement. Automation and effortless access to information have become the oafs trampling the flower beds.

There's an element of techno-profligacy at work here that's hard to counter. "It's cheap! It'll make you go faster! It might save your life! If you're against it, you're an irrational curmudgeon!" It seems that invoking the word "safety" is done to stifle discussion. But will a greater degree of safety really enhance the sport, or is sport without risk meaningless? And the claims of GPS increasing safety may be false comfort. Against the obvious advantage of precise inflight knowledge of position and maybe wind must be weighed the less distinct effects of data entry error, increased attention to the instrument panel, over-reliance on the numbers to the exclusion of such factors as weather and terrain, and a lessened familiarity with map features and the terrain itself.

There is a difference between advances in glider performance and the use of piloting aids. No matter how good the glider, it still depends on the pilot's skill and intuition to find a way toward lift, away from sink, and ending at the goal. Increases in glider performance merely change the size of the stage on which the pilot performs. On the other hand, cockpit automation reduces the dependency on the pilot to some degree. Future instruments may erode this dependency further, until a soaring flight becomes no more demanding of the pilot than a carnival ride. The only thing that now prevents contests from being waged between pilotless gliders is some software and a few servomotors. Building a glider that could fly itself around a task might be interesting engineering, but it wouldn't be sport.

I believe the skills involved in orienteering are ones that competition scoring should include. In map-and-compass orienteering, the competitors usually cannot go in a straight line between points. If they could, the winner would simply be the fastest runner. In soaring, the pilot mixes a vat of factors – course deviations so far, visual features versus map features, cloud patterns, wind, terrain ahead, landing options – and, without any calculator except the one in his head, chooses the direction that feels right. Isn't that a skill worth honing and rewarding?

Competition soaring drives some of this trend toward technology. Clearly, one can't have much of a competition if there is so much chance involved that skill plays a small part in the outcome. The unfortunate result is a temptation to eliminate the role of luck and chance entirely. The rules are constantly being revised to make the playing field more "level" – allow everyone to start at the same time, devalue days, eliminate home field advantage, allow team flying, allow nav aids. But if soaring is boiled down entirely to a science with deterministic outcomes, the sporting appeal evaporates. Paul MacCready and others gave us a formula for speed-to-fly, but it is still based

on the pilot's ability to guess what lies ahead. Why not accept that the winner of any given contest owes his good fortune not only to his identifiable skills, but also to random chance and to some unquantifiable piloting abilities? Isn't that part of true sportsmanship?

Formula 1 auto racing has struggled with these issues. In a sport far deeper awash in money than soaring, the rules committees have had the resolve to disallow some technological aids. Traction control, anti-lock brakes, active suspension, and computer control of throttle position and gear shifts all became illegal. Why did they take these steps? Cost had something to do with it, but perhaps equally important was that the role of the driver was being overwhelmed by the technology, and the fans were losing interest. A well-funded team could do well no matter who was driving. Restoring the ability of the driver to influence the outcome of the race rejuvenated interest in the sport.

All that said, it lies with each pilot to decide what he wants out of soaring, and each can choose to forego the use of any instrument that offends his aesthetics, even if the tide of popular opinion is against him. Between the extremes of "jump naked off a cliff" and "spare no expense" is an optimum sporting level, which is different for everyone. Only when we sacrifice our own interpretation of the sport to fly badges or competitions does any of this matter. Ideally, everyone would have a forum in which their sense of aesthetics allowed them to compete. This means making clear differentiation between FAI classes (unlike what happened with the Standard and 15m classes). There should be a class where purists can compete on equal grounds with a minimum of technological assistance. Since the World class, more than any other class, is intended to equalize glider performance and high-light pilot skills, perhaps it should rely solely on pilotage in the cockpit. In Open class, anything goes – in between are harder questions. The appropriate use of technology is a wonderful thing. Blind acceptance of technology will be the end of the sporting aspect of soaring. ❖

*I thought I was at a soaring meet – there were sailplanes on the ramp and trailers in the tiedown area – but something was different. There was this new vibe going through the crowd. Finally it dawned on me: I was not at a sailplane race, I was at a Nintendo convention! That's right, with pilots walking around with game boxes in their hot little hands punching buttons furiously as they wandered among each other with comments like, "What the hell do these numbers mean?" to "How many waypoints will yours take?" There were pilots who had strapped the things on the dash of the car on the trip down and were showing anyone who would listen the route they took and the time it took and telling exactly where they were when they made a pit stop. Believe it or not, that is not the most boring part of this new gadget. They can plug it into a computer and on the screen will appear an image of the task flown. For the most part it looks like one of those ink splotch tests they give to see if you are a mass murderer.*

Charlie Spratt, *Sailplane Racing News*

## ... on being a Luddite Hal Werneburg 1995/6

THE ISSUES which Richard Carr raises so eloquently in *Technology and the Nature of Sport* should not be easily ignored unless we as soaring pilots are willing to accept drastic changes in all major aspects of our sport in a very short time. Marching to technology's drummer is probably inevitable, but let's take small steps and perhaps even stop for a while to look around and appreciate what we have available to us presently before rushing blindly on down the road to cyber-Heaven (or Hell) and perhaps abandon aspects of our sport which have served us well over the years. Adopting technologies just because they are available is not likely to enhance the overall enjoyment of soaring and may indeed have a negative impact on how we and any newcomers view and participate in our sport.

It cannot be denied that there has always been willing acceptance of "new and improved" systems, especially at the high performance end of our pilot population (eg. competition and record flying pilots). As Richard Carr points out, increasing aircraft performance merely results in the pilot acting on a larger stage, but adopting more cockpit automation schemes leads us into new, and to me, undesirable directions.

I have owned and flown sailplanes which ranged from what we would now call primitive gliders with rudimentary instrumentation to the most exotic carbon fibre racing machine complete with highly sophisticated flight controls and instrumentation, a mega-channel radio, flight computers, and triple redundant variometers. But, if I were to measure total return in enjoyment against the cost and complexity invested, I suspect the balance would likely favour some of the earlier days. Call me a "latter-day Luddite" if you want, but let's take the next steps in the sport very carefully in order to avoid drowning in a swamp of high-tech acronyms which have little to do with developing soaring skills and everything to do with automation and "flying by the numbers". The choice is ours. ❖

# Omarama and the moral dilemma

*Many pilots have major reservations about the way international gliding competitions are going. Perhaps it was the excellence of the Omarama organization that enabled pilots to focus on the difference between the form and the substance. Tony*

**Justin Wills** 1995/5

OMARAMA PROVED CONCLUSIVELY that the ingredients for success in international competition now include not only skilled pilots, but also substantial financial backing, experience in local conditions, and a large integrated team, providing effective air-to-air and ground-to-air networks. Team flying is nothing new in competition gliding, the Poles have demonstrated its benefits for years, but the advent of GPS and its associated information have made it far more effective. Future developments of GPS-related systems will increase this further. Significantly, for the first time in competition, following the introduction of GPS at Borlänge there was a tie for first place in the 15m class by the French, and at the 1994 European contest the German team managed triple joint winners in the Standard class. At Omarama, the German Open class pair were second and third overall, eleven points apart.

Omarama undoubtedly emphasized the benefits of external aid, due to lift from slopes or wave remaining constant over long periods making relayed information particularly valuable. Furthermore, the tasks for all three classes overlapped extensively each day. Thus the clear competitive advantage of large teams posed many European entrants with an awkward choice: given the cost of competing in New Zealand (over \$18,000 Cdn per entry) they had to send a large team or accept they were unlikely to do well. The organizers contributed to this situation by allowing teams of up to nine pilots per country, and inviting further suitably qualified pilots to compete as individuals, but no doubt they needed additional entrants to help their finances. The outcome was evident from the entry list: whilst 91 competitors from 23 countries looked superficially impressive, over 40% came from just four countries and over 60% from seven countries. A number, including Belgium and all the former eastern block with the exception of Poland and Chechnia, decided not to be represented. Other leading countries such as the Netherlands and Italy sent only two pilots each. The results appear to have vindicated their decision; of the nine medals, only one went to a team of less than six pilots.

Looking ahead, the major beneficiaries of this shift of emphasis from the individual to the whole team approach will be those countries with good funding and the facilities to train pilots intensively as a team, notably France and Germany – the hosts for the next two World championships! Losers will include the USA whose geographical spread of pilots and their individualistic approach, reinforced by their local contest rules, renders the skills of team flying using external aid an anathema. Likewise, smaller countries with few pilots of the necessary calibre will find it almost impossible to be successful.

Many competitors at Omarama felt profound disquiet at this prospect. The switch from “may the best man win” to “the best financed and organized team will produce the winners” seems unfair (whatever that means), distasteful, and inappropriate; one of the principal attractions of gliding is the quality of individual self-determination, and this is reflected right up to national level. What justification can there be for a different approach in international competition? Part of the answer (or excuse) is money. With the cost of internationals so high, nearly all competitors receive external financial support. Undoubtedly, the pressure to produce results to encourage continuation of this support is a spur to producing a good team by whatever means possible. The introduction of the World Cup team prize further emphasizes this. Other facts include maintenance of the status quo. Given the special skills required to fly in international contests, it is increasingly difficult for newcomers to enter the arena successfully. Many of the contestants at Omarama (including over 50% of the British team) have been flying in world contests for over ten years. Only ten pilots were under 30 years old.

Herein lies the moral dilemma: the majority of pilots were members of teams of six pilots or more, enjoying a significant competitive advantage over the rest. Everyone enjoys flying in a World championships



with its privileges and financial support. Thus there is a strong temptation to follow the Victorian mother's advice to her daughter when faced with inevitable rape: lie back and enjoy it. This seems an unworthy epitaph for such a magnificent sport as international competitive gliding, but it is not inevitable.

The problem of limiting in-flight external information could be solved at present by simply locking all competitors' radios on to a single frequency to be used only for safety and communications with the organizers. The necessary policing procedures would need to be established, but given the element of widespread collusion required to break the rule to advantage, violations should be very rare. Pilots would still be able to fly in visual contact with others, but this would not provide an unequal competitive advantage. The reversion to competitors competing as individuals (incidentally as specified in the rules) may also lead to an improvement in international camaraderie.

Reduction of costs has been the object of lip service from time immemorial. However, the high costs incurred at Omarama produced a new spate of suggestions. First, out of 24 World championships, four had been held in the southern hemisphere, which contains less than 10% of the world's gliding population. The implication is that for at least the next twenty years the contests should be held in the northern hemisphere.

Secondly, whilst a lot of attention is paid to the entry fee and cost of aerotows (\$33 Cdn at Omarama), the real focus should be on the total cost incurred by the various competitors. Thus World championships should be held in places where there is an adequate supply of competitive gliders available for those coming from afar, and the entry fee structure should be graduated according to the distance competitors have to travel.

Thirdly, reducing the scale of World championships would make them safer (for the first time in ten years the 1995 WGC, with its reduced entry, it suffered no midair collisions) and a size limit on national teams would reduce the advantage of those able to send large contingents, and smaller contests should be cheaper and simpler to run. It was reported that over 3000 volunteers were involved at Omarama compared with 75 at Wiener Neustadt in 1989. This progression is obviously unsustainable and needs to be reversed.

Finally, major savings might be achieved if World championships took place on a regular circuit. The present system of one-off venues has produced little evidence of long term benefit to the host countries in terms of membership, funding, publicity or airspace concessions. The investment required has to be recouped from the single event and expertise gained is lost. By returning to regular venues there should be substantial savings in costs and enhanced prospects of sponsorship. Sites discussed included Rieti, Châteauroux, Leszno and Uvalde. Repeated visits to these venues would reduce the home advantage as the local conditions would become well known internationally.

Although these topics were keenly debated at Omarama, all were unanimous on one point – it will prove exceptionally difficult to persuade the various governing bodies of our sport to alter the present system. This gulf between competitors and organizing bodies is no stranger in sport – look at tennis and motor racing. Competitors want to concentrate on what they do best, the sport itself, and usually make inept politicians (a comment they would regard as a compliment!). So the real dilemma that confronts our sport is that which besets the Western world; with a gliding philosophy as imprecise as “Liberty and Equality”, how can government attract the appropriate governors and the approval of the individuals concerned?

Failure to do so is reflected in countries crammed with talented and skilled populations ranging from the USA to Italy. International governing bodies suffer from the additional “Swiss Lover Syndrome” – the proposition that asserts the European ideal as English policemen, French cooks, German mechanics, Italian lovers and Swiss organizers, whilst political reality produces English cooks, French mechanics, German policemen, Italian organizers and Swiss lovers – a view based not on cynicism but on historical realism. Those of more extreme political or religious views ascribe the dilemma to Western decadence. If one rejects that view, then either the system must be made to work or we must acquiesce like the Victorian daughter. Which is it to be? ❖

*Since Canada is one of the “minnows”, it is in our interest to shift the competition scene back to an emphasis on individual rather than team effort. It seems clear that there are sporting and financial gains to be had. SAC must develop a national consensus on how World competition ought to be structured, and pass strong recommendations on to the IGC. Tony, 1995*



# The “sport” of soaring

**Tony Burton** 1996/4

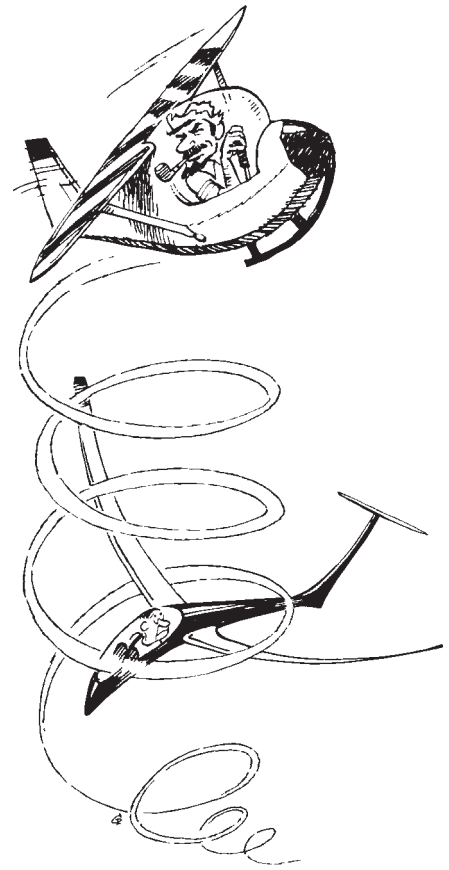
SEVERAL THINGS CAME TOGETHER at the Nationals [at Red Deer] which required a little thought from me, and now I hope from you. When I mentioned to one of the Cold Lake organizers that for all the work they were doing, it was good that the Canadian Forces at least gave them a little Temporary Duty to officiate at the Nationals, I was told that the CF Regulations defined gliding as a recreation, not a sport, so no military support was available, even for some time off!

Another was the fact that the Sports class in Canada came of age in Red Deer in 1996. The class was as well represented as the 15m class, it fielded a diverse range of sailplanes (only four of which had a handicap greater than 1.00) and they were piloted by skilled cross-country pilots – none of whom could be described as new at the game. It was hotly contested, with daily winners all over the list, and there was no doubt about the best pilot – who was flying a rented two-seater! It was truly a pilot’s class, and I hope to see it continue to prosper.

Another was the interesting discussion at the Canadian Advanced Soaring meeting one evening. The old hands at this sport noted that the average age of Nationals pilots seemed to be going up almost a year per year, clearly a sad sign for the future if it continues. The old hands said that we have to make the next generation want to compete because it will be an achievable goal for any pilot who develops his skills. To accomplish this, we must recognize that the present competitive system we have in place in Canada is broke, so what do we change to fix it? (Jörg Stieber, president of CAS, and the SAC Sporting committee are open to suggestions from all of you out there.)

Comment from the floor was that, because of the expense of new gliders, and because of our relatively short list of pilots who now vie for a place on the Canadian team, perhaps it would be appropriate to generate a single seeding list from every pilot who flew at a Nationals, Sports class included, with all sailplanes being handicapped. The only operational change required would be for everyone to fly the same daily task. Once such a list had been generated, the top Standard and 15m class pilots on the list would fly in those classes at the Worlds. This system would also have the long term benefit of encouraging a new generation of pilots to get into competition by the more “level playing field” of earning team seeding points even if you don’t happen to own a Discus or a Ventus this year. The further “trickle-down” benefit could be more interest in cross-country flying by pilots who now see a broader competitive goal to strive for. The old hands, a few of whom I expected to take a dim view of this sort of change, seemed to agree that there was some fine-tuning required of the concept, but there was no killer argument which would make such a change unworkable.

It was refreshing to see some really good discussion on improving the sporting aspects of this lovely means of aviating, and particularly on the awareness of all us old hands that club support for and a growth in the interest of cross-country soaring by newer pilots will keep them in the sport and keep the sport healthy. What doesn’t grow, dies. ❖



# Why bother with badges?



**Harold Eley** 1997/3

COULD YOU PERSUADE some high-priced salesman type to write an article for *free flight* proclaiming the merits, necessity, feeling of accomplishment, and absolute joy! of earning FAI badges. We have a very ho-hum attitude to badge flying in our club and probably in many other clubs. We need to change this. I have just reviewed FAI badge rules with our members using your fine new guide. I came to realize that there is really very little interest in this aspect of our sport. In my day, about 30–40 years back, badges were a hot item. Everyone wanted to acquire them. The problem was whether the equipment was good enough and could you do it. In our family (over two generations), we had five Silver badges by 1961 as well as a couple of Gold legs and a Diamond badge. We were always proud that we were lucky enough to achieve these awards. I think it should still be important. The present generation in our club doesn't see much merit in trying for badges. Too much red tape and trouble for a badge that means nothing to them!

FAI badges are a measure of achievement (and this is a criterion for gaining funding support from Saskatchewan Sports). In our club we have a program which covers part of the expense of getting each badge leg. This has had only moderate success, so money doesn't seem to be the problem. I suspect that the same lack of enthusiasm for FAI badges prevails throughout the sport. Do you know of anyone who could rouse the masses with a fiery dissertation to change this wrong-headed thinking? It might help. ❖

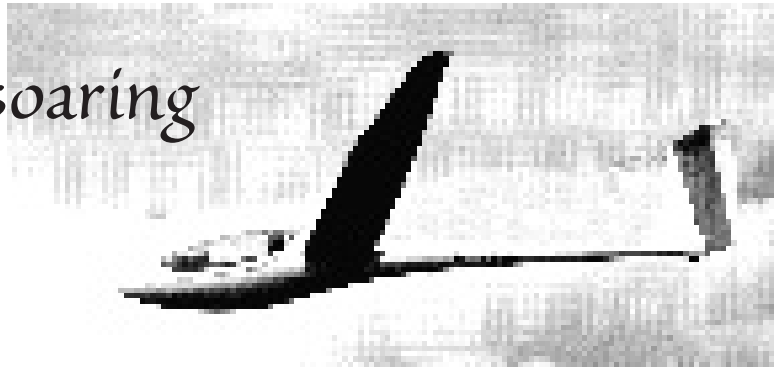
## **Tony responds:**

*Well, what about this question/challenge? I suppose if there is an answer we must first define the problem:*

- 1. Is it really the paperwork burden?*
- 2. Is it because pilots are uncomfortable with the prospect of going cross-country?*
- 3. Is it because the club does not encourage badge flying in some way?*

*If one is motivated to do badge flying, #1 is no real deterrent – besides, is this “red tape” any more a problem than what people manage to handle every other day in their non-flying lives? I suspect that the paperwork hassle exists only because it is unfamiliar and/or unprepared for. A club that keeps its members' flying skills growing does itself a favour in increased safety and reduced damage claims and answers #2. A club that encourages excellence in all aspects of this sport does itself an immense added favour in increased flying activity, income, and member retention. The badges, from A to Diamond, are a proven, visible achievement ladder – so use it. For the active pilot, badges are a goad to soaring advancement. For the pilot/tourist, showing your Gold badge at a foreign gliding club is an immediate introduction into the world circle of soaring friendship. Cross-country is a challenge and fun – what gliding as a sport is all about. I invite others to help “justify” going after the badges.* ❖

# A concept of soaring



**Earl Menefee** 1999/5

FOR YEARS I'VE WONDERED what it is that attracts so many of us to soaring. What is so compelling? Most of us who are addicted will admit that it is a lot of hard work. If that's true, why do we find the appeal of motorless flight so strong that at times we lose sight of, or perhaps even deny, our common sense duties and obligations? Surely, these questions have bothered others of us too. Also, it is very likely such questions have been asked by those affected by a loved one's soaring, but who themselves do not directly participate in this time consuming activity. Well, for once let's look at soaring and its associated activities directly in the eye, and question what we find there. This may not be the best course to follow, since occasionally it happens that when we chase a question down to its ultimate end, we discover an answer that is not exactly what we had hoped to find. But, let's take that look anyhow.

First there is, without a doubt, the beauty of it. There are fantastic vistas of aerial scenes exposed to what would otherwise be unknowing eyes. Views heretofore enjoyed only by the wild soaring birds. Sights of such colour and magnificence passed too quickly in powered aircraft to be readily absorbed in our minds. The slowly sweeping masterpieces of nature are laid out before our view while man's scars gradually disappear to their proper insignificance. Even the beauty of the flight itself, a seemingly effortless, wheeling glissade across the sky, either to some pre-named goal or just for the love of it. Or, the beauty of the aircraft themselves which are, through a long process of evolution, approaching the quintessence of aerodynamic perfection. All this and more if we keep on searching. There is the release we feel (or escape, if you will) from our daily and sometimes humdrum lives. This alone is enough to cause some people to continue their interest in high performance gliding.

Often when soaring in a gradually ascending and controlled gavotte of circling sailplanes, or perhaps coasting along the windward side of a cumulus street, we find ourselves near the top of the infinitely soft water vapour cotton balls beholding the elegance of these clouds and of the changing landscapes far below. We may then become aware of a sense of detachment from everyday concerns. It's a separation from worldly cares experienced in few other ways. The solitude and quiet can become so complete that signs of human existence (other than our own) have completely disappeared and we are left alone with our conscience and Healer in a manner seldom achieved in the life of the non-soaring man.

A hedonistic pursuit? Perhaps. For even all the other facets of the soaring game such as constructing, instructing, crewing, repairing, flying the towplane for some other lucky blighter, or even working with others on the same dreams and compulsions on soaring organizations of even national importance, can all bring a large measure of pleasure just due to association. The days, even years we may spend in building or lovingly repairing a sailplane, are all touched with a certain magical glow simply because we are continually aware, as we stumble on, that this too has something to do with soaring and, as such, that it is enough to make it all enjoyable. When the time does finally come for the first long anticipated flight, it unfailingly seems to make such sustained effort worthwhile. Hundreds, even thousands of hours of groundwork fade away and are readily compensated for by the completion of a terrific hour or two of seemingly effortless flight.

Also, there's the challenge of it. We dare to emulate the birds – they that appear so free – though they too are confined by gravity, worldly cares and family obligations which may not be so apparent to us. But man has, for perhaps longer than recorded history, envied their apparent escape and exultation. We too can rejoice in a soaring flight well done. The adventure of it is sometimes fraught with a dash of danger that makes the uninitiated question our actions with a jaundiced eye. Our answer to their concern is, of course, that we do it for the same reason that man has always taken up his challenges. Soaring stirs his heart. For its very essence is beauty, and in this he glories and finds his love of it.

In theatre, it is the accolades and the applause that create in some actors a continual need of recognition, while to others in the same craft it is the thrill of knowing that they have achieved a near perfect performance. To the soaring pilot who has savoured the magnificence of a glorious flight without power, little else will suffice until he too has tasted it again and again.

Finally, in time, the realization comes that perhaps inexorably advancing age, or maybe one's native ability, or even personal financial resources do have their limits after all, and he (or she) recognizes that one can taste only so much of the wine before the bouquet slowly begins to fade. So, he then may recall the beauty he has enjoyed due to his soaring activities, the pleasure of just being associated with motorless flight, and with the people with the same dreams and flight aspirations. He may at that time begin to settle back to earth, knowing he has shared in one of the most intriguing and beautiful of sports in his allotted time on this earth. ❖

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## To crash or not to crash ...

**William Snow** 1998/1

*On this first issue of 1998, the stories and articles that have dropped into my electronic in-basket have a distinctly safety-oriented slant. So as an editor my job was simple – display all this very good stuff in a readable way. The trouble with safety is, of course, that it's a boring non-event until some lack of it either scares the hell out of you or does you damage. Let's start off with a great little piece by William Snow that I found on the internet the other day. Pay him close heed ...*

IF YOU LOOK AT THE STATISTICS, soaring has a decent safety record. In the accidents that have happened, most were *not* the result of an “unforeseeable, uncontrollable, unpreventable” freak event. Most factors appear to be judgement, fatigue, etc. The northern California club I am with is fifty years old and has never had a fatality at a club soaring activity. The club has had aircraft damage in the past, and most of it was preventable from an accident prevention standpoint. In my limited experience, poor judgement complicated by either stress, fatigue or lack of experience seems to have been the chief factor. I am aware of only one metal fatigue issue that years ago caused one aileron to partially function in flight. The aircraft came home safely. I believe I can assure my wife and children that I am relatively risk free if I:

1. keep up my flight time and recent experience,
2. fly within the limits of my known abilities,
3. keep my eyes open in flight,
4. on takeoff and landing have more than one option available in case of an emergency,
5. fly when I am rested and healthy,
6. insure my equipment is in good working order,
7. make sound judgements, and
8. stay away from others who do not follow rules 1 to 7 above.

Like any other accident chain of events, most people who have accidents have generally violated the above rules and end up eventually losing. When we say we are pushing the limits we are generally breaking some rule and showing bad judgement.

I feel that the real question is not if soaring is safe. The question is, “am I safe”. Statistically, my chance of an accident is either 0% or 100%. As an individual, it either will or will not happen. If I continually break safety rules I am pushing the 100%. If I always follow 1 to 8 above I am helping to assure my 0% accident rate.

I have no consolation in statistics when I fly. If I break some of my rules and I am in the process of scaring myself to death, my ability to start following my safety rules is my ticket to safety. I do not think to myself, “I wonder what the accident rate is in gliders this year.”

The safety of a sport is the combined safety record of all of the individuals. My record and most of my club members is no wrecks and no injuries. I am not hoping to keep it that way; by following my safety list I plan to keep it that way. Metal fatigue or a freak meteorological event may still occur, but that's not my biggest danger – my biggest danger is me. ❖

