# THE LEADING EDGE
## The Newsletter of the M.I.T. Soaring Association, Inc.
## November 1995

Acting Editor: Mark Tuttle

## Contents



## Tom MacJarrett: CFI of the Year

**Mark Tuttle**

Tom MacJarrett has named CFI of the Year by the Boston FSDO. The last issue of the FAA's *Aviation Safety* newsletter announced the award with the paragraph:

> "Thomas MacJarrett is the winner of the CFI of the year award for the Boston FSDO and the New England Region. Captain MacJarrett is a flight instructor at the MIT Soaring Association of Sterling, MA and is the commanding officer of J Company, 305th Training Battalion (provisional) for the Army."

Congratulations, Tom!

## News Briefs

**Mark Tuttle**

Miscellaneous news and gossip from the field and email:

*New Members:* Please welcome Jim Emken, our newest club member. Jim is a private pilot who learned to fly in New York, and is in the process of getting checked out in club gliders.

*Milestones:* Paul Lynch was recently checked out in the L-33. Matt Sovis entered and recovered from his first spin (and survived!).

*Young pilots:* There is a plan a foot to introduce a group of Boy Scouts to aviation by helping them earn their aviation merit badge. The activity will include about 20 scouts from a Sterling scout troop attending a short ground school, followed by demonstration flights spread out over two or three days. Contact Mark Tuttle if you are interested in participating (home phone 617 648-1106, email tuttle@crl.dec.com).

*Ridge Encampment:* A group headed up by Joe Kwasnik and Steve Sovis worked to make the Blanik trailer road-worthy and transport 118BB up to Sugarbush for a Ridge Encampment for two weekends. The word on the street is that the encampment met with heavy wind and rain both weekends, and only got one flight off. We are sorry about the rain, but grateful to these members for all the work they put into refurbishing club equipment.

*Chris Kurz:* Our old friend Chris Kurz has made email contact with the club. He has assumed his new life as Professor Kurz at UCSD (ckurz@sdphu1.ucsd.edu), and writes the following to your humble editor: "I just thought I'd let you know that I am still alive. Maybe more so than in the 'dark' year before -:) — I can attest to the fact that there is life after MIT. In fact, it isn't bad at all. I do interesting research (right now we are figuring out how to cool and trap positrons so that we can make anti-hydrogen), the weather is gorgeous (spent last Sunday on the beach thinking about rainy Boston weather turning snowy soon), and I live 10 minutes from a nice airport (Palomar-McClellan, CRQ, if you want to check it out). Flying gliders has been tough, though, since the closest serious glider port is Warner Springs – more than an hour's drive. That's why on many weekends I can be found piloting a Decathelon tracing weird loopy trajectories in the sky. Aerobatics is fun!"

*Elections:* The January newsletter will contain a ballot for electing the next board of directors, and this newsletter includes a form you can use to nominate club members for positions on the board. Consider nominating yourself. If you fly a lot (as either a student or private pilot) and you care about the club, then you already satisfy the most important qualifications for most positions. Feel free to replace me with yourself!

# First Wave Climb

**Mark Koepper**

October 22 — Immediately after release at 2500 ASL I climbed well for 3 or 4 turns and then the thermal was gone. Just minutes after pulling the release I had lost 500 feet and was thinking about that last place to search for lift before landing was necessary. Same old story; a day with high winds aloft and reasonably strong but broken thermals.

Half an hour later I was near cloudbase at 4000 feet ASL. This time I had saved the flight, managed to climb sporadically and clawed a few miles upwind. The flight service forecast had winds from the west with speeds of 19 knots at 3000 feet and 34 knots at 6000 feet. Windy conditions have always been a weak point for me. I seem to find large areas of sink. Often I will climb well for a bit and suddenly the thermal seems to vanish leaving me feeling foolish wandering around in sink trying to relocate the thermal.

There are things to be learned of course which will produce better results on these days. I'm beginning to get a vague handle on what to do when I'm climbing through a "shear zone" where the wind changes direction with height. On this day the wind on the ground was out of the south and at 3000 feet it was out of the west. I found that climbing up through about 2800 feet ASL would consistently produce the vanishing thermal situation. More than once the remedy of turning downwind (east at this height) brought me back into lift and the thermal continued on to cloudbase. More than once that did not work and I stumbled off in the turbulence hoping to find another thermal before pattern altitude found me.

I had given up on going cross-country and was staying high and upwind of home. While taking the easy way out added nothing to my miles logged I did begin to see patterns. Both visually in clouds and perceptively by hanging out forever in one area before moving on I became aware of "sink bands" which ran approximately north-south. I discovered that lift found in these bands would turn out to be more broken, and lots of height could be lost trying to work it. Wisps of cloud would form in these bands but disappear quickly. Narrow "good" bands between the sink bands (again perpendicular to the wind aloft) were the place to be. Here the lift was choppy and broken but the thermals and clouds would remain long enough to climb to cloudbase. So instead of cloud streets running with the wind there were bands of cloud running at 90 degrees, a situation you would expect to see with ... ... ... wave. If there was a light bulb connected to my brain which showed my level of understanding the conditions, it would have begun to glow dimly here.

The bulb shone brightly about 3 miles west of Mt. Wachusett when I reached cloudbase and dove out from under the cloud heading west directly into the wind. The plan was to fly to the next band of clouds but as I pulled up I found weak, smooth lift. My first real wave climb really made a great impression on me. After two hours of thrashing turbulence with the vario swinging wildly up and down, here I was in absolutely smooth air with the only sound a very steady tone from the vario. As I climbed the tone got higher pitched and at 7500 feet ASL I was climbing at 4 knots. What a different world up here above the clouds!

# Standard Class Nationals

**Phil Gaisford**

The first task of the 1995 standard class Nationals was undoubtedly the task of getting there. We clocked 3100 miles from eastern Massachusetts to northern California, or very nearly coast to coast. Probably only Bruce Dyson had a longer trip, by virtue of starting from Marblehead as opposed to Bedford. Pat and I decided to treat the trip as part of the experience, and enjoy it as best we could, and arrived after 6 days on the road. At least the navigation wasn't hard - you drive down to I-80, then just stay on it for the next 5 days and enjoy the scenery. My favorite was probably the last hundred miles through the redwood forests of northern California, with the occasional glimpse of snow-capped mountains through the trees, though you did need to watch out for the logging trucks whilst taking in the scenery.

Siskiyou Co. Airport is located near the town of Montague in northern California, in the broad valley of the Shasta river. The valley floor is pock marked with cone shaped structures of volcanic origin, but is otherwise landable, and civilized — this is cattle ranching country.

To the west, the countryside becomes mountainous with tops in the 6-7000' range. With over 1500 hours of soaring in the Alps, this only rates as medium on my scale of sizes. To the east, after crossing a ridge, the terrain flattens to a high plateau containing some farm land, but in other areas comprised mostly forest and lava beds from the regions now dormant (but not extinct) volcanoes. Mt Shasta itself lies about 30 miles to the south of the field, and reaches up to over 14000'. Although visually spectacular at all times of day, the old volcano didn't yield much in the way of interesting soaring conditions.

After very strong conditions during the period of last years Sports Class championships, the weather didn't quite meet our expectations. The practice days were characterized by an unseasonably moist and cool air mass — soarable, but weak lift and low cloud bases, with the occasional shower. The weather then slowly shifted mode to "unseasonably stable". This sort of weather pattern is often attributed to a phenomenon referred to as the contest effect. This period was typified by late starts, weak thermals and blue skies. Many favored contestants fell victim to a "premature" landing during this period. One day everybody landed out — some of the local residents, seeing the trailers leave the airport, thought that the contest was over. We then had a thunderstorm day with just four completing the task (I finished fifth), and closed with two days from the miscellaneous category - uncertain, mixed conditions and PST tasks. In between, a couple of days were lost to rain.

So what sort of performance did your correspondent put in? In essence, pretty good. I finished in sixth place, and had a lot of fun in doing so. I even managed to win a day by the not inconsiderable margin of 5 mph, which didn't feel bad either. I also enjoyed the opportunity to really concentrate on soaring for a prolonged period, which together with the chance to test (and show) one's mettle, forms a large part of the attraction that competition soaring holds for me.

After celebrating the new champion, John Bird of Florida, there remained the small matter of the return journey and the deed was done. Next year, we only have to travel to New Mexico — preparations are already in hand.

# Ground School Classes

**Joe Kwasnik**

A MITSA ground school will be held in January, 1996, for all members interested in attending. The school will be held on each Saturday in January. The times for the school have not yet been worked out. The place for the school will be at the New England Electric System headquarters in Westboro. So far, the following students have expressed interest in attending: Mike Ellis, Tom Ellis, John Fulghum, Steve Glow, Bernie Loraditch, Steve Sovis, Matt Sovis, Mike Welles, and Terry Wong. Any other students should contact me to tell me of their interest (home phone 508 366-0474, email kwansi@neesnet.com). John Wren has generously agreed to conduct the school. As we get closer to January, I will provide more details on the times and what materials (books) you should have for the school.

# Solo and Cross Country Standards

**John Wren**

*John Wren, our Chief Instructor, has modified the requirements for flying club gliders solo or cross country. —Ed.*

## Solo Requirements

### General

1. All students and pilots flying in or towing behind MITSA aircraft must be a member of MITSA.
2. MITSA medical and SSA requirements must be met.
3. Must meet all FAA and MITSA currency requirements.
4. Student pilots must have an instructors entry in their log book stating that they have completed a pre-solo written test for type being flown.
5. Any member holding a valid FAA pilots license may decrease flight requirements for the 1-26, 1-34, and L-33 by 50%.
6. Instructor means MITSA instructor.

### L-23 Trainers

1. Students:
   (a) Instructors sign-off.
2. New members:
   (a) At least three check flights, which should include:
      i. Stalls.
      ii. Spin entry.
      iii. Emergency rope break.
   (b) Instructors sign-off.

### SGS 1-26

1. Must be signed off solo in the L-23.
2. 10 solo flights in the L-23.
3. Instructors sign-off.

### SGS 1-34

1. Must be signed off in the 1-26.
2. 10 hours solo in gliders.
3. Instructors sign-off.

### LET L-33

1. Must be signed-off in the 1-34.
2. 25 solo hours in gliders.
3. Private pilots license or better.
4. Sign-off by an instructor who has experience in the L-33.

## Cross Country Requirements

1. FAI Silver "C" Badge.
2. Must have 5 hours and 10 flights in type being flown.
3. Sign-off by a C/C rated instructor.

*or*

1. SSA Bronze "C" Badge.
2. Must have 5 hours and 10 flights in type being flown.
3. Sign-off by a C/C rated instructor.
4. One of the following:
   (a) Complete the MITSA C/C seminar.
   (b) Complete 3 hours of C/C dual time with a C/C rated instructor.
   (c) 50 hours solo, FAI Silver "C" Duration and Height completed, and each C/C flight must be approved by the CI or ACI.

## Kindred Spirits

**David Cohn**

As a traveler, I frequently find myself in the company of strangers whose companionship I am obliged to share, whether for a few minutes or a few hours. It may be in a stalled check-in line somewhere, or on the long bus ride home when a Sunday afternoon squall forces me to leave my beloved 1946 Skyranger behind. As a pilot, I find a great deal of pleasure in these chance encounters: beyond the uncomfortable silence of strangers forced upon each other, there lies a whole other world of experience, just one “Hi there!” away. Besides, these encounters invariably give me the chance to talk about flying, pull the Skyranger’s “baby pictures” out of my wallet, and re-tell the tale of how my flying buddy found the rare bird in a scrap heap six years ago. Those who know me know that I never miss the chance to talk about flying.

The chance came again last week, in Lebanon, NH. I’d flown up to spend the weekend with a few old friends. The New England summer was out in all its glory, so I’d come up from Boston the long way: a stop at Hampton Field to sip a Coke in the shade and watch the Cubs and Champs shoot touch and goes in the grass, then westward, low and slow over the Merrimack river valley. The late afternoon sun on those rolling hills had peppered the sky with scattered cumulus. “Turbulence” to those whose only business in the sky was getting from Point A to Point B, the thermals turned the sky into my playground. As a result, I had spent much more time flying than strictly necessary, throttling back to take a turn or two in the rising air, and watching the red-tailed hawks above, whose looks of obvious disdain made it clear that my flying skills would never match theirs.

When my earthly commitments and dwindling fuel supply brought me to ground at Lebanon’s 5000 feet of asphalt, I fueled up, tied the plane down for the night, and called a cab. Cabbies, I’ve found, are frequently kindred spirits. They’ve heard a million good stories, and always seem game for one more. I climbed in, buckled up, and began to tell him of the roiling sky and red-tailed hawks that had filled my afternoon. “Well,” he said sagely, as we pulled out of the general aviation parking lot, “the important thing is that you made it here safely.”

That, as they say, put an end to that. For this man, no older than myself, the airplane was merely a device constructed to move people around quickly and comfortably, and was to be tolerated only for its convenience. There would be no stories; I was stuck in the company of a stranger with whom I could not talk about flying. The ride would be 15 minutes, and there was nothing more I could say.

The saving grace was that we had to pick someone else up at the passenger terminal. Perhaps…? No, just a little old lady who lives in town, he said. For want of other conversation, we joked, somewhat unkindly, about what she would have to say of her turbulent flight up. We fell silent as the cab pulled up to the terminal. The woman, a prim but sturdy New Englander in her 70’s climbed in, said her polite ”hello”s, and we were on our way again. There would be nothing but smalltalk on this trip.

After the proper pause, our cabbie asked, knowingly, “So, how was your flight?” A short, but unhurried response: “Oh, it was a little rough…” The driver poked a thumb back in my direction. “You should see what *he* came in on – a tiny little airplane!” She turned and asked, genuinely, “Really? What kind?”

I didn’t really know at what level to answer her question, so I pulled out the wallet photo and proffered my catch-all opener. “Oh, it’s a little antique two-seater, a 1946 Commonwealth Skyranger – nobody’s ever heard of them.” Her voice softened as she looked at the picture, and her eyes got a faraway look. “Oh, that’s *very* nice,” she said. Then quietly and wistfully, added “I used to own a ’39 Aeronca Chief. An old 11-AC…”

In those fifteen minutes we shared in the cab, I learned that she’d grown up in a farm town in Michigan. That at age 6, a barnstormer had come to town, and her grandfather had bought her a ride, making her promise not to tell her mother. That by the time the wheels had cleared the farmer’s field, she had known that she was meant to fly. The barnstormer had flown down Main Street, and she leaned over the side, waving and yelling to the people below. By the time they landed, mother already knew, but the die was cast.

She soloed when she was 18. In those days, it was unthinkable for a poor girl from a farm town to take flying lessons. There no money, and besides, what business would a woman have learning to fly? But where there’s a will to fly, there has always been a way. She organized a flying club, perhaps the first in the state, and sought out members from the neighboring towns. Six men, doctors and lawyers, put money to buy the Chief, and she ran the logistics. Paperwork, maintenance, tiedown and insurance, and she got to fly for the price of gas.

Years later, after a husband and kids, she didn’t get to fly much, but the magic of flight was still alive in her. She told me, almost whispering, of how she’d take the old Chief up to altitude, alone. She would pull the nose up, pull the engine to idle, and ride down in a falling leaf maneuver, slipping this way and that. It was something personal and beautiful, she confided, to hang in the sky and trust in the wind.

Too soon, it seems, we were in town, and it was time for me to go. The cabbie, silent for the entire ride, thanked me for my tip and looked at his two pilot-passengers like odd ducks. The woman held my hand warmly and wished me a pleasant stay. Then the cab was gone, carrying off my newfound kindred spirit. As it rolled away, I realized that I had not had the chance to tell her anything of my flight that afternoon – of the grassy airstrip, the rolling hills, and red-tailed hawks. Somehow, though, that didn’t matter: I knew she had already been there.

The top of this page contains a condensed address list. Just cut off the top of the page and stuff it into your wallet.

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## MITSA BOD Nomination Form

I nominate the following club members for the following positions on the MITSA board of directors:

1. President:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
2. Vice President:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
3. Secretary:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
4. Treasurer:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
5. Logistics:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
6. Operations:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________
7. Maintenance:
   Name: ____________________ Signature: ____________________

My name: ____________________
My signature: ____________________

**Note:** Your nominees must sign next to their names to indicate their willingness to be nominated. All nomination forms must be received on or before December 22, 1995, by Mark Tuttle, 8 Melanie Lane, Arlington, MA 02174.

The top of this page contains a condensed address list. Just cut off the top of the page and stuff it into your wallet.

## Proposed L-33 Contest

**Bill King**

*MITSA received a proposal for a national L-33 contest from Bill King, 994 St. Catherines Dr., Wake Forest, NC 27587, billking@nando.net, (919) 554-0626. —Ed.*

Dear L33 Solo Owner: I am writing to you to see if you would be interested in attending a L33 Solo contest next year. We now have 23 L33s register in the US and would like to see if there is enough interest to hold a contest. The initial plan is to hold a 2-3 day fun contest. Most likely it will be located somewhere in the Southeast as that is where the majority of the L33s are. Please let me know if you would be interested and if you have any suggestions for the contest. Regards, Bill King (N201J).

## What a Birthday!

**AOPA Pilot**

Garret Willat celebrated his fourteenth birthday in style, soloing 18 gliders comprising nine different makes and models. Two days later he flew a 431-mile solo cross-country glider flight — accompanied by his dad in another glider — from Warner Springs, CA to Hatch, NM in a Grob G-102. The flight qualified him for six soaring badges and set a new Arizona State Youth Distance Record. Willcat's parents, Bret and Karen, own Sky Sailing, a soaring center at Warner Springs Airport. (Reprinted from *AOPA Pilot*, November 1995.)

**Acknowledgements:** David Cohn, author of "Kindred Spirits," is a tail-dragger pilot who was also a member of MITSA for a while. David has been periodically posting essays on his flying to the Usenet newsgroups on aviation, and generously agreed to allow the his essay to be printed in our newsletter. *AOPA Pilot* is published by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Frederick, MD.