THE LEADING EDGE

The Newsletter of the M.I.T. Soaring Association, Inc.

August 1997

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News briefs

Mark Tuttle

New ratings: Ken Gassett has added a glider rating to his commercial certificate, and has written about his flight test on page 7. Good job, Ken!

New members: We have two new members since the last newsletter: Paul Cooke of Webster and John Clayton of Northboro.

Paul writes, "I am a registered nurse working in the emergency room at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester. I am a former flight nurse there. I soloed in powered aircraft years ago, but I'm not licensed. Once I got signed off to solo, I would just fly until the money ran out and never finished. I have a few flights in gliders from years ago and like it better than power. A few weeks ago, I passed by Sterling Airport to and from the Massachusetts Wing Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Conference and saw the flying operation. I felt that if I didn't stop right then I might never, so I stopped, joined, and took a couple of instructional flights. I'm glad I did. I'm a major in the CAP and squadron commander of the Goddard Composite Squadron at Worcester Airport. I'm married to Tina, also a nurse at UMass, and live in Webster, on the lake, with our four dogs (one doberman and three whippets)."

John writes, "I live in Northboro with my wife Heather and four children from four to twelve years of age. I've been a pilot for ten years, and have owned a Skyhawk, Champ, and my current 1968 Aerobatic Bonanza (see Figure 1), which is kept at Worcester. I work with two other glider pilots, Bob Fletcher and Mike Newman, at our company, NetPhone, in Marlboro. My dad got me interested in gliding as a kid, when he bought the molds for the Concept 70 sailplane, and built about ten of them. My first flight was at the age of ten in my dad's side-by-side Pratt-Reid glider. I look forward to completing my power transition, and learning to soar."

New tow fees: New tow and retrieve fees are going into effect this week. See the minutes of the board of directors meeting on page 2.

President's column

Phil Gaisford

In recent weeks, several members have discussed with me their concerns over club operations and ways in which we could improve the efficiency of how we go about flying at Sterling. Your board of directors has discussed this at length and have decided to tackle the issue with a two-pronged approach. First, we will improve DO training. Bob Fletcher has been tasked to recruit a lead DO team for this purpose. I might add that there is still time to volunteer for this prestigious post before Bob turns to a more directly persuasive approach. Second, we will be increasing the experience level of our DOs in general by requiring that all solo pilots participate. Volunteers already serving the club in some capacity may be exempted, should they so wish.

The board also discussed the shortage of instructors. We have a number in candidates in training, and intend with the above changes to have an efficient organization in place so as to be able to best utilize these resources when they become available.

Minutes of the Board of Directors

Rob Playter

These minutes have been edited for publication in the newsletter. —Editor

August 5, 1997

Directors present: Jim Emken, Phil Gaisford, Steve Glow, Al Gold, Carl Johnson, and Rob Playter. Others present: Ian Clark, Bob Fletcher, and John Wren.

Club finances: The shortage of students is showing in our finances. The sale of the Blanik wing was a crucial source of income. We need to estimate our expenses for the rest of the year to see if we will be able to cover our costs. Steve Glow will report this estimate at the next meeting.

Operations: Flights are way down. On some weekend days we are only launching six flights. A bad day used to be fifteen launches. Now fifteen to twenty launches is a good day. On hot days, we should not tow above 2,500 feet. The last 500 feet takes too long and is inordinately expensive.

New tow fee structure: We are implementing a new tow fee structure to help cover our cost of operations. The following schedule will be used.

hook-up	$12
500 feet	$13
1,000 feet	$15
1,500 feet	$18
2,000 feet	$20
2,500 feet	$25
3,000 feet	$30
aeroretrieves	$70/hr

Clubhouse: A trailer for a clubhouse is still hard to come by. Carl found a trailer, but it was too expensive. MITSA members should keep an eye out for large trailers for sale. We would like something 10 feet by 40 feet.

Golf cart: The Harley Davidson shop in Worcester has lots of golf carts costing between $900-$1,300. We currently have only one cart available. Golf carts should be filled with regular automobile gas only. The aviation gas contributes to fouling of the plugs. DO's should check that golf carts and both gas tanks (in Citabria hangar) are full in the morning before operations. Draft someone to fill them up early in the day rather than waiting to the end of the day. Make sure to put golf carts away on the right side of the hangar.

DO training: Bob Fletcher suggested that we make a concerted effort to draft and train duty officers. Our operation could be significantly improved by simply standardizing procedures and encouraging duty officers to organize and lead the launch operation rather than try to do all the work themselves. Bob will solicit help from some of the private owners to help train and organize the duty officers. We should improve the DO training sheet we have as part of this process.

Tow pilot training: A similar standardization and training procedure for tow pilots could also improve operation efficiency. Ian Clark has offered his help. This issue will be discussed with the chief tow pilot.

Flight instructor training: We should continue the process of training new flight instructors.

Required contributions to the club: The board of directors has ruled that all solo pilots in the club will be required to work occasionally at the field as either DO, tow pilot, or flight instructor. We feel that this requirement will contribute to the long term vitality of the club. It has not been decided what action to take if solo pilots do not perform their required duties, but we feel some consequence should result. Bob Fletcher proposed that as an alternative to serving in this capacity, the solo pilot could sponsor a Sterling local youth in his or her flight training with MITSA.

MITSA outreach: Bob Fletcher proposed that MITSA make a greater effort to get young people involved in the club. He argued that many heavily involved pilots got "hooked" at an early age, and he and Phil Gaisford are examples. We could set up a program of getting local youths to work at the field as "line boys" as a way of earning instruction and flight time.

Our name: Should we rename ourselves. MIT Soaring Association may be an exclusive name. Many people assume that you have to be associated with MIT to join. A name which appealed to the Boston local community might result in more enquiries for membership.

Our future: Bob Fletcher encouraged the board to engage in some long-term planning about the future of the club, and to find ways to make permanent improvements like a club house, playground for children, trailer hook up, grilling and picnic area, and power and water supply that will help soaring become a family activity.

Region I profit: The club seeded the Region I contest with $100. John Wren repaid the $100 along with a $325 profit from the contest. Thanks, John, for all your efforts with organizing the contest.

August 23rd fly-in at Sterling: The operators of Sterling are sponsoring a fly-in at Sterling on August 23 with August 24 as a rain date. This will shut down normal operations, but we should have one Blanik and a commercial pilot on hand for rides. A flight demonstration by one of our more experienced pilots in a pretty plane might provide some good entertainment and good will with the airport operators. We could do instruction at Gardner on that day for people from the fly-in who are interested.

Figure 1: Jay Clayton in his Aerobatic Bonanza.

A Franconia holiday

Al Gold

692, the 1-26 that Walt Hollister, Joe Kwasnik, and I share, is taking a summer vacation in Franconia, New Hampshire. Each of us is paying it visits, so it doesn't get too lonely up there in the mountains. On July 18, as I drove along the Franconia Parkway through the notch, I said to my son, "I'd forgotten how beautiful this country is!"

First stop was the airport, a grass strip at the foot of Cannon Mountain that cries out for white silk scarves and leather helmets. Knowing that Walt had come up the previous day, I was surprised to see 692 at its tie-down. I found Walt in the FBO's office. "Why are you down here?" I asked. "Because you said you'd be here at 11:30," he replied. It was about 1:00 p.m., and I sheepishly urged Walt to go fly it for another couple of hours while my son, Joe, and I got some lunch and dropped our stuff off at the Kinsman Lodge.

Rustic — that's the word for the Kinsman Lodge. It's a couple of miles down the road from the airport. It started out as a rambling farm house a century or so ago. In the winter it's a ski lodge. The Franconia Soaring Club leases it for the summer and makes its dozen or so rooms available to other soaring pilots, too. The decor is country attic, pardon the missing paint or wallpaper here and there. The bathrooms are down the hall. Pillows, blankets, and paper goods provided; bring your own linens, towels, and soap. There are two huge kitchens, with fridges and cabinets to store any foods you may choose to bring in and cook. The spirit is communal. On the weekends there are lots of kids and dogs. It costs $17 a night per person!

There are other lodging options. The Franconia Inn, an elegant place with a gourmet dining room, is directly across the road from the field. There are any number of pleasant country inns and B&B's within a couple of miles. You can also pitch a tent or park a camper beside the runway.

I came back to the field at 3:00 with a fully-ballasted belly. I was soon at the end of runway 36 hitched to the tail of the FBO's 235-horsepower Call Aire. Now there's a tow plane! Imagine a Pawnee scrunched up to look even uglier and painted a dirty yellow. As far as I can tell, most of that power is converted to a fearsome racket that so irritates some of the adjacent property owners that they periodically complain to the State Police. It certainly doesn't all go into climb, which with my glider attached, is a modest five to six knots. However, it's a heavy, stable platform that sticks in one spot on my canopy in all but the heaviest turbulence, unlike 094. I learned later that the tow pilot and other locals were surprised when I popped off at 1,500 feet a half mile from the runway in a big four knot thermal. They seem to be used to everyone ritually towing to the ridge south of the field and hanging on to 3K. Heck, with tows costing $20 for hook-up plus $5 per thousand feet, they're lucky I didn't get off at 500!

The wind drifts me peacefully over the Cannon Mountain ski runs and Echo Lake as I spiral to cloud base at 5,500 MSL (field elevation is 970 feet). Time to explore the high ground west and south for a while. Soon the thermals are getting weaker and the sky darker — overdevelopment here we come. The sky to the southwest is now a very black wall split by an occasional thunderbolt. Even if the lift weren't rapidly dying, common sense dictates a prompt return to the field after about 45 minutes. As I tie the ship down, a police cruiser arrives at the field. "Does the field have a Doppler radar?" the officer asks. He's come to tell us that there's a severe thunderstorm watch in effect, just in case we are both radarless and blind. Welcome to mountain weather! Now Walt, Joe, and I have to decide where to go to dinner.

The metropolis of Littleton is about eight miles up I-93 from Franconia. It's the closest thing to a real town in the area, discounting Lincoln about 15 miles south of the mountains, which looks to be mostly tourist traps. I'm told Littleton has an investment casting plant that gives it a real economic function, beyond skiers in the winter and vacationers in the summer. Main Street boasts a two-screen movie house and a string of modest-priced restaurants, including a genuine diner that's clearly changed neither decor nor menu since it opened in the fifties. Our first dinner of the trip is at the somewhat grander Clamshell House at the edge of town. Good local minibrews are featured. Walt is getting up at 5:00 the next morning to go to a CFI revalidation clinic in Maine, so turns in early. We read a little while before following suit.

Saturday starts chilly, misty, and gray, with clouds resting on the hilltops. That's nice for my morning jog. We go to the field after breakfast, but it's an optimist's ritual. Roy Bourgeois arrives in a Skyhawk from Worcester ready to fly his ASW-17. He says the weather is beautiful down there and then borrows a parka that that the FBO has hanging in the office. He gives up after about a hour and takes off for home. Terry Terrell, the FBO, looks glum. Most of his income comes from tourist rides for people staying at the Inn, which also happens to own the land the field occupies. The rest of us hang around a bit longer and then execute our various plan B's for the day. Ours is walking an area called the flume gorge in Franconia Notch National Forest. It's mostly beautifully denatured nature, with board walks where there might otherwise be slippery rocks or mud. There's even a shuttle bus to save you part of the walk if you choose. Withal, it's been tastefully done by the National Park Service, and the scenery is extraordinary. That evening it's Littleton Diner roast turkey and mashed potatoes and a movie in Lincoln.

As I finish my Sunday breakfast at the lodge, I can hear the tow plane droning along the ridge. Joe decides to go for a trail ride, another offering of the Inn's, and I'm ready to fly at about 11:00.

The serious glass is coming out of the trailers. Dave Howe of Greater Boston is in his LS-4. Three or four others are soon also rigging. The cu's are streeting, the bases are at 6,200 MSL, and the visibility is approximately forever. It's like being back in Nevada. I run a street to the north past Littleton to the Connecticut River valley. On the way back I just gawk at the the scenery, flying just fast enough to make the audio vario stay quiet. My stomach tells me it's time for lunch at about 1:00.

Joe's enjoyment of the trail ride has been enhanced by the fact that a pretty young lady was the leader and he was the only paying customer. He's hungry too, and decides he'll take a lesson in one of the FBO's 2-33's in the afternoon. Off I go again. This time I'm at 2,500 AGL by the time I reach the household thermal over the Mittersill ski condo development on a toe of the ridge. As I begin my climb, Andy in the yellow SGS 1-23 announces on the UNICOM frequency that he's just northwest of the field at 10,200 MSL in wave. I radio back that I'll try to join him as soon as I've topped out the first thermal. The bases are now up to 7,100. I head off in his direction getting down to about 5,500.

I search and wander. I find some turbulence that might be rotor and try unsuccessfully to climb in it.

Andy says he's right above the field at 9,600. I go back. I find some smooth zero sink. After 45 minutes of searching about, I give up on the wave, and head off to the west to explore the area. My empty tummy tells me to go home a little after 5:00.

Andy lands a few minutes later and is euphoric. We go out to dinner at one of the better places in Franconia, the Hillwinds. He floats above his chair the entire time. Not a bad day for a glider built in 1949! Mine wasn't too terrible either.

Monday is overcast. The wind is blowing out of the north and there are several areas of lennies visible to the south of the mountains. How high up are they? How far? Farther down wind over unlandable terrain than I probably dare go in a 1-26, seems to be the answer. Terry's ride business is slow, so he's pleased when Joe decides to do a couple of lessons with him. There are some interesting looking clouds west of the field. What the hell, no one else is using the tow plane. We'll give it a try. Victor Melnick, has come up from southern New Hampshire to tow for a couple of days. He's a jolly fellow I've met on a previous visit. His father flew in B-24's in World War II. He takes me toward the interesting clouds. At 2,500 feet there's a bump. I get off and look for the lift. My audio soon beeps, "up," with the electric vario showing +2 knots. The mechanical varios says -2 knots, and the altimeter agrees with it. I switch off the electric, which is being erratic and head for home. The next bump is my wheel touching down on the grass.

Back on the ground a local pilot who's just landed his Cessna 150 tells me that it sounded like my mike switch stuck open after my first transmission (to the tow plane), but was OK after I announced my pattern entry. The electric vario mystery is soon solved. If I let the peg on which the mike hangs turn too far forward, the mike switch pushes up against the trimmer and stays open. Transmitting on the radio drives the Ball vario nuts. One day we'll put it on a separate battery.

Lunch can be a nice ritual on a day when lift is scarce. I barely resist washing it down with a beer. Back to the field for Joe's second flight of the day. He's pleased to have made his first-ever landing on the first. Buying one expensive tow on a flat, gray day is foolish. Buying a second is just plain dumb. This time we go way west of the field. Nothing. At 3,000 feet, Victor radios that he's turning back and will flat-tow me to someplace within more reasonable gliding distance. He cranks in a couple of notches of flap and throttles back to about 55 mph. At least this time my varios agree with each other. We hang around the airport until dinner time, and then meet Victor at the lodge.

It's Littleton for dinner again, this time at Topic of the Town. It's another eatery out of my college days in the 50's. Afterwards Victor is in the mood for a motor tour of nearby towns. We cruise northeast to Whitefield and then swing southeast to Twin Mountain, to look at the

Figure 2: Dominique Estival on her first day of towing solo.

airport there that's for sale. For just $450K you get a 2,600 foot paved runway, a big, quonset-type hangar, open T-hangars, and a large house. There's room for expansion and a grass strip. A fair sized motel is adjacent. Someone should be able to do something with that. I guess I'm just nostalgic about country airports and hate to see yet another one disappear. On the way there traffic suddenly slows. There's a bull moose standing not 20 feet from the road in the twilight.

Tuesday begins with packing for the homeward drive. There are scattered cu by 10:30. Joe takes another lesson. I go off, as does another privately owned 1-26 based at the field. At first he finds better lift than I, and I'm not too proud to leach. Visiting Twin Mountain by air seems a good idea, so I go off to the east. It takes me a long time to figure out that there's nothing in that direction but a blue hole. Then I realize that I've also got to fly back through it! The house thermal lets me play a bit longer, but it's past noon and time to put away the toy and head for home. I've a commitment that evening.

This isn't your typical soaring story. In five days I spent about seven hours in the air, not much by many people's standards, and I seldom got much farther than 1-26 gliding distance from the field. It's a vacation story about a nice place to spend laid-back time and do some flying. My son had fun both on the ground and in the air. It's a place you can go with family where the non-pilots will have lots of nice things to do too. I don't know how much longer it will be there. The neighbors complain of the noise, and one of them owns the south end of the runway. Terry can't seem to make a go of the business and wants the Franconia club to take it over and put him on salary. It's not clear that they can afford to do that. There's the inevitable talk of relocating to another nearby airport. But while it lasts, it's a lovely spot for a brief holiday with flying, or, as Roy and his ASW-17 can attest, serious soaring, especially in the fall when the ridge works and the waves form. You might want to give it a try.

Where are they now?

Dominique Estival

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As you see, I am no longer in Switzerland, in fact I left a year and a half ago. I am now at the University of Melbourne, and enjoying living in Australia. I will write something for the newsletter later, because I've done a lot of interesting flying here. I got my private license (power) in France before leaving, and I have become one of the two pilots for my club here. I attach a picture taken last year on my first day of towing solo (see Figure 2). Have fun flying!

Where are they now?

Dave DeLonga **ddelonga@gate.net**

I occasionally check the MITSA page to see what's going on. I'm still in the Navy. I'm now at the University of Miami (Florida) being retrained to be a physician (I used to be in the submarine force). I haven't been soaring in a while, but I do rent a Cessna 172 fairly frequently to keep up my proficiency. Hope to stop by the next time I'm up in New England.

Where are they now?

Shaun Keller **keller@world.std.com**

Hello to all! Even though Cathy and I haven't been soaring in a few years, we still feel a part of MITSA and like getting the latest news on the club. Work, family, and house fix-up are keeping us busy. We moved from our very old fixer-upper house in Boston last year to a significantly newer fixer-upper in Lexington. (And I swore that the the next house wouldn't need fixing up!) Cathy continues at MIT Lincoln-Lab and I've been working on speech recognition for about three years at Dragon Systems in Newton. Our two daughters are growing up fast with the older having just finished kindergarten. We don't know yet if they will be eager soaring pilots, but they like going really high on the swing set, so it looks promising. Happy soaring!

Where are they now?

Derek Sherlock **dereks@fc.hp.com**

Catherine and I moved to Colorado April last year. We bought a big house at the foothills of the Rocky Mountain Front Range. Catherine has started a home business doing facials and retailing skin-care products. It took a while to get started, but her business is really taking off now. I'm working as an ASIC design and verification engineer at Hewlett Packard's Fort Collins Systems Lab.

I haven't yet joined a gliding club, and my instructor rating expires this month, so I guess I won't be renewing it. I still have the Pitts and am now competing in Intermediate category aerobatics, so far with results that aren't much to brag about!

Now that I live in such a great climate, I have started cycling fairly seriously. I do 35 kilometers every day, and am really getting into shape. I've also been doing some white water rafting and water skiing. I'm planning on entering one or two 150-mile bike events this year.

Where are they now?

George Hossfield **hossfieldg_iii@compuserve.com**

Seth is serving a mission for his church in Norway. He has been there since March and will be there for another year and a half. He is learning the language there and meeting many of the people. We hear from him often (at least once a week by mail) and he is very excited about being there. Of course, he hasn't really flown there except by bicycle (the wind is very strong). When he gets back I expect he will be looking for a good school.

As far as I go, I spent most of last year in England. I did find a gliding club there not far from where I was living, but the weather was never good enough when I had time off. I am now back in the States (since February), and now traveling to Indiana most of the time (about 80% of the time). That means I spend as much time as I can with my kids. I often think about bringing the two youngest (girl 18, boy 15) to Sterling to test out their interest. I might yet if I can be set free on a weekend. For now it seems that travel is employment.

I do think of MITSA often and I do miss gliding. It's the best!!

Operations schedule

Al Gold

Here is the MITSA operations schedule through the start of October, correct as of August 8.

MITSA DUTY SCHEDULE
August – September 1997

Date	DO	Instructor	AM Tow	PM Tow
8/2	Kucan	Moysey	Kazan	Proops
8/3	Welles	Baxa	Ryan	Clark
8/9	Loraditch	Baxa	Fletcher	Easom
8/10	Gold	Rosenberg	Friedman	Gassett
8/16	Tsillas	NA	Gammon	Hollister
8/17	Brine	NA	Kazan	Proops
8/23	Wong	Wren	Ryan	Clark
8/24	Watson	Baxa	Fletcher	Easom
8/30	Kucan	Baxa	Proops	Gassett
8/31	Gold	Rosenberg	Gammon	Hollister
9/1	Johnson	NA	Kazan	Clark
9/6	Loraditch	Moysey	Poduje	Friedman
9/7	Tuttle	Baxa	Fletcher	Easom
9/13	Sovis	Wren	Friedman	Gassett
9/14	Watson	NA	Gammon	Hollister
9/20	Welles	Baxa	Poduje	Dershowitz
9/21	Wong	Moysey	Fletcher	Easom
9/27	Tsillas	Wren	Friedman	Gassett
9/28	Kucan	Baxa	Poduje	Hollister
10/4	Johnson	Rosenberg	Gammon	Proops
10/5	Tuttle	Moysey	Ryan	Dershowitz

Two final glides

Mark Koepper

What's the L/D? I'm sure most glider pilots get this question over and over. I usually answer something like, "I don't know... somewhere in the 30's, I think."

The new Sailplane Directory lists 37 for my Dart, so maybe I'll try saying 38 for a while (employing the popular hearsay value plus 1 method).

To me, the glide angle in still air at ideal speed does not mean much. What I want to know is, "How much altitude do I need to get there?" Since I'm much too cheap to buy the latest GPS-integrated glide computer, I rationalize that I'm gaining valuable fundamental experience using methods of the same vintage as my 30-year-old glider. I currently use a very simple glide calculator made of cardboard described in the Byars and Holbrook book "Cross Country Soaring." I guess the L/D possible based on my guess of the head- or tailwind component, and then read distance against height.

The pilots of the sixties, however, did not have the advantage of calling a GPS glide computer equipped buddy for a wind report. I've done that a time or two and then used my JSW whiz wheel calculator where you input known wind component and get out height vs distance. Another great advantage I have is a handheld GPS (cheap) which allows me to monitor my glide easily. In an instant I can get a precise distance-to-go reading. The old timers had to read a map for that.

The other day I did a downwind final glide, with the day working well, from near Jaffrey. Starting at 5,500 feet, the glide angle to get home kept getting steeper and I kept flying faster, eventually getting home with 2,500 feet. Mighty stuff that wood and fabric. Covering 23 nautical miles, using up 3,000 feet along the way is over 45 to 1.

The very next day while rigging I got the question again. "What's the glide ratio?" I patted the plywood and proudly said, deadpan, "46 to 1... measured it yesterday."

Later that same day I found myself near Jaffrey again. All the cumulus clouds in the area were shredding apart and disappearing. My drift while attempting to climb told me that this time the wind was definitely not blowing my way. Eventually I started a hopeful and necessarily final glide. I flew best glide speed plus half the guessed headwind component. Every 500 feet, I read miles to go from the GPS and checked the glide angle to get home, hoping it was steeper than the last time I had checked. This day was not the day before, and it fluctuated both ways, averaging around 26 to 1. The ups and downs along the way made it interesting; a difficult decision to continue rather than divert to Fitchburg. In the end, I had a good look at some fields close to Sterling and eventually started my pattern somewhat lower than usual. The overall glide turned out to be just under 25 to 1.

What's the L/D? What's the glide ratio? Maybe next time I'll smile and say... "Depends."

Winging it for a commercial rating

Ken Gassett

The day before the flight test I was told by Richard Gammon there's a little problem, the tow plane is in the shop at Fitchburg. A few calls confirmed to me that everything will be corrected. I didn't sleep well.

At 9:30 a.m., designated examiner Wally Moran arrived as expected. A people person, 55 years old, he has been flying for TWA since 21 when he had about 1,500 hours of instructor time and was almost a graduate of Purdue University. His plane is a B-747-100 to Rome, Milan, or Tel Aviv. In the fall he upgrades to B-767. He also survived Carl Icahn.

A two-hour oral starts under a tree. My mind is blank about some tow plane signals. Not good. The rest is right-on or I'm winging it.

Bernie Loraditch shows up with glider, next Mark Koepper and glider, then then Richard who will now fly over for the tow plane. Great thermal day.

Two flights and a rope-break are planned. The flight test covers a lot but is not overly taxing. Stalls imminent, turning, and full. MCA straight ahead and turning. Steep turns left and right. Steep turns — 360 degrees to ground reference heading. Box the wake. Steering turns. Slack line. Recovery from unusual attitudes. Accuracy landings, and using runway 34L, I used last airplane before the hangar as touchdown point then stopped before opposite end of the hangar. (A little off on the touchdown point.) Altimeter was covered for one landing. Rope break next, but the golf cart has broken down and my very good wing runners want to launch. After launching Bernie, Mark wants to go. I press Mark too hard to let me go next and get told that all commercial pilots should be able to make an unassisted take-off. Maybe his relief tube will bite someday.

Physically, I'm run down, pushing the glider, hooking up, no water. But with a little wing roll on take-off (50% me and 50% gust of wind) the wing is up. Richard is acting crazy in the tow plane, rocking his wings. He does it again, I get the meaning: release now.

Wally's final comments were: Exchange signals between glider and tow pilot before launching. Fly low as possible over runway before tow plane lifts off. Head watching outside cockpit more. Use clearing turns before maneuvers. The license is mine.

I could not have done it without Ken Rosenberg CFIG. Constantly at the airport as scheduled. His very unbiased comments and assistance. Thank you. Richard Gammon helped when I needed a tow plane pilot unscheduled. Thank you. Bernie Loraditch and Mark Koepper helped as true good club members. Thank you.

The club has a policy not to let unlicensed members fly solo without an instructor at the field on duty. I have thought from the beginning this serves no one any good, if instructors are few and the student has been checked out to solo. Sometimes policy must change if a crisis exists or things are not working properly. Even governments change policy when needed. *Supervised solo is a requirement in our insurance policy. —Editor*

Soaring at the height of summer

Nancy Sheehan

The following article appeared under the headline "The height of summer. There's more than one way to get a real bird's-eye view of Worcester — and beyond" on page 3 of a special insert "Summer Book '97" to the Worcester Telegram & Gazette (www.telegram.com) —Editor

STERLING "They're perfectly safe. We fly them all the time. Trust us."

Spoken with a crisp British accent, Andrew Watson's words reflected a confidence that did indeed inspire trust. He had the assurance of an upper-class, old-movie Royal Air Force lieutenant spurring his World War II bomber squadron to the sky. But there would be no roar of Channel-bound planes at the close of Watson's pep talk.

In fact, there would be almost no sound at all.

Watson is a glider pilot who flies with a Sterling Airport-based group called the MIT Soaring Association. The gliding club, whose founders were scientists associated with Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has grown to include members who wouldn't know the heavy end of the periodic table of elements from the light side.

But light aircraft they all understand, and their motorless planes offer one of the most peaceful and pleasing ways to get a bird's-eye look at the area.

Other avenues abound for those seeking lofty spots with a sweeping view. Hot air balloons are another gentle way to cruise the skies, You could take a lesson behind the wheel of a small airplane — the kind with propellers. Or you could take flight with the wings on your feet, hiking or biking up trails that lead to local high places with panoramic scenery.

Gliding gracefully But the Soaring Association's gliders provide an especially graceful way to see the bigger picture. You can sample the gliding life with a single-day membership, at $50, that allows you to get away from the ground with one of the group's pilots. The experience gives you a feeling for why club members, all full-grown, responsible adults, voluntarily and routinely tool around at 10,000 feet in a powerless plane.

"It's the freedom, really," said Watson, a computer software expert who divides his time between Framingham, his native England, and Sterling Airport. "I enjoy the challenge. When you're up there, you've really only got yourself to rely on."

When to let go Not so first-time glider riders, who forsake the customary single-seat glider for a training plane with one of the club's experienced pilots in the other of its two seats. The glider is pulled aloft by a long yellow rope attached to a tow plane. When sufficient altitude is achieved, a rope-release lever is pulled and the glider is set free. But it takes a knowledgeable glider pilot to know when to let go.

"That's the tow-rope lever," Watson said, a tad nervously perhaps, as he strapped a neophyte into the tight cockpit of a training plane on a recent sunny Sunday afternoon. "It's a good thing not to touch, especially, when we're low down. I'll be releasing it at about two and a half thousand feet."

The cockpit grew noticeably warmer as the glider rose toward the shining sun. As the height of nearby Mount Wachusett was surpassed, Watson pulled the lever, and the glider fell soundlessly away from the single-engine tow plane. To the right a red-tailed hawk flew alongside the glider, seeking the same sort of thermal — or updraft — that Watson was looking for. Thermals are what propel gliders — and hawks — upward.

"We keep an eye out for hawks," Watson said. "They're better at spotting thermals than we are."

Below, the whole of central Massachusetts as well as part of New Hampshire spread out in all its pond-flecked glory. Wachusett Reservoir was the largest pool in a horizon-spanning string of glistening water patches. Thick woods stretched out in all directions, punctuated mile after mile by tiny, evenly-spaced specks. At ground level those specks loom large — the new, often palatial houses sprouting up in woods and on former farmland throughout the area.

Twisting plumes of smoke from late springbrush fires and backyard leaf piles rose to greet the glider. To the east, a hazy, blue slice of Atlantic Ocean glimmered just beyond an imposing clump of Boston office towers.

"This doesn't make much sense if what you're interested in is just a way of getting from A to B," Watson said, as glider and hawk, flying in a loose formation, continued their skyward spiral. "If that's what I wanted, I would learn to fly power. But I think this is really more enjoyable."

For those who prefer the comforting purr of a well-tuned engine or two as they leave *terra firma* behind, flight school might be more than a flight of fancy.

Amity Flight School at Worcester Airport offers an introductory lesson for $30. Once in the air, students who seem willing and able might find themselves actually flying the plane, according to flight-school manager Douglas A. Lord.

Dinner on the fly If working the rudder makes you shudder, you can opt for a high-flying sightseeing tour and leave the driving to one of Amity's trained pilots. An airborne spin around the city costs $15 per person, with a minimum of two people. Longer — and commensurately more expensive — flights can be arranged by calling in advance.

For a summertime getaway, Lord suggests perhaps taking off early in the evening for dinner on Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard. Diners who leave Worcester hungry by about 4 p.m. can return with a full stomach by about 9 p.m., he said. Another beachy day trip is a trek to Montauk Point on Long Island.

"The airport is almost right on the beach," Lord said. "They have a little pickup truck that drives you down to the end of the runway and you just walk over the dunes and you're right on the beach. When you want to come back, there's a little flagpole at the end of the runway. You hoist the flag up the pole and the people down in the shack at the other end of the runway see it, and they send the truck down to pick you up."

Sterling Airport also offers plane rides over the hilly terrain to the north of Worcester. Rides, which last about 20 minutes, cost $45 a planeload up to three people

On solid ground But you don't need an expensive pair of rented wings to see the sky-high sights. Near the 2,000-foot-high Worcester Airport, an almost out of sight partially paved path leads to an open area with expansive views of Worcester and beyond. If you head up steep Airport Drive from Mill Street, go past the airport turn-off to the right and a brick building that houses a tree service on the left. Shortly there will appear a chained pathway, also on the left and giving public access to a city-owned parcel of land. Head up the path, which is loosely paved with road shavings. At the top of the rise, a cleared area offers east-facing vistas that stretch, on a clear day, from Coes Pond to Boston.

Similarly impressive sights can be enjoyed by anyone who walks, drives, bikes, or hikes up the well-groomed trails at Wachusett Mountain State Reservation in Princeton. The mountain, strikingly taller than its surroundings, rewards climbers with sweeping, 360-degree views.

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