The Leading Edge — September 1997

The newsletter of the MIT Soaring Association

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News briefs

Mark Tuttle

SSA dues are due: Most of you will find a form for renewing your membership in the Soaring Society of America enclosed with this newsletter. MITSA is a chapter of the SSA, and the SSA simplifies its paperwork by assigning a common renewal date to all members affiliated with a given chapter. The renewal date for MITSA is December 31. Since you are an SSA member and the SSA knows you are affiliated with MITSA, you are receiving a renewal form with dues prorated so that your SSA membership will expire for the next time on December 31, 1998. This means you may be paying a little more or less than the normal $55 annual dues, but starting next year it will be $55 every year as usual. MITSA members are strongly encouraged (in fact, expected) to be members of the SSA. If you are not a member, please contact the SSA by writing to SSA, PO Box E, Hobbs, NM, 88241-7504, by calling (505) 392-1177, or by faxing (505) 392-8154.

Tow plane maintenance: The tow plane was grounded the first weekend of September by an airworthiness directive. A batch of defective piston pins left Lycoming in early 1995, and not all of the pins have been accounted for. Our tow plane had a cylinder fitted in February, so there was a very slight chance that one of these pins had been used in the repair of our tow plane. After some quick work by Ian Clark and Jim Emken, the tow plane was inspected and declared free of the bad pins. Lycoming will probably pick up the bill.

Unfortunately, two cracked cylinders where discovered during the process. The cracks are in the area of the exhaust and intake ports, and each of the bad cylinders had already been repaired in the past. Replacing the two cracked cylinders will give us three new cylinders out of four, counting the one we replaced back in February. With all of these new (and improved) cylinders we hope not to see anymore problems of this nature, as these repairs are expensive. *Tow pilots*, please review and use the proper cool-down procedure when descending to prevent shock-cooling the engine: in particular, reduce power slowly, never less than 1,400 rpm in the descent, and keep the speed below 120 mph. *Glider pilots*, please limit tows to 2,500 AGL in very hot weather. Work on replacing the two cylinders is expected to be completed by September 12, and the tow plane should be available for the weekend of September 13 after some break-in time before towing.

John Wren kept the club running that weekend the tow plane was down with its AD. John towed both days all day in the Citabria, and did six tows on Saturday and eighteen tows on Sunday.

New members: We have many new members this month.

Fred Stewart (fredfanjet@aol.com) is a 17,000 hour bizjet pilot, and he writes, "Except for my military career (draftee) where I was the chief flight instructor of the Fort Rucker Flying Club — a flying club operated by the Army for the education and recreation of the troops and the civilian employees of the Army — the only job I've ever had has been that of a general aviation pilot. My flight experience has included flight instruction, crop dusting, charter, and corporate aviation. Early in my corporate career, I fell into a job that involved considerable amount of international flying. That led me to a Fortune 500 company where I was employed for the last 33 years. The last 17 years I was the chief pilot and manager of aviation with operations in Chicago, Philadelphia, Sandusky, Ohio and Salta, Argentina. We bought the first Fan Jet Falcon in 1965 (hence Fan Jet Freddy) so since that time most of my flight time has been in jets, mostly the Falcon 20, Falcon 50, and recently Canadair Challenger 604.

"I had my first and second glider flights at Wurtsboro, New York in 1953. My third flight was at Hinckley, Illinois in 1993. I added a glider rating to my commercial certificate that year and to my instructor certificate in 1995, and I removed the aerotow-only restrictions last year. In spite of numerous resolutions, I've earned only the A, B, C, and Bronze badges so far. In Illinois, I belonged to the Sky Soaring club and was an L-19 tow pilot. I own an L-33, "3", which will be moved to Massachusetts later this month.

"I'm still commuting to Illinois but will retire in October plan to do a lot of soaring."

Terry McKinney (mckinney@openmarket.com) writes, "I decided on a glider ride to celebrate my thirtieth birthday in August, and after a quick search on the Internet, found the MITSA web page and the offer of a demo flight. I knew before the end of the flight that I was to join, and within three weeks I was back at Sterling with a new (used) car bought just for the purpose. I'm a classical singer working at a software company in Cambridge, just waiting to be discovered. I've never done any flying before, and my friends consider this new hobby entirely out of character for me."

Bill Detrich (iceman@neu.edu) writes, "I am a professor of biochemistry and marine biology at Northeastern University. I teach biochemistry to both undergraduate and graduate students and conduct research on Antarctic fish at Palmer Station, Antarctica, during the southern hemisphere fall (March to May). I began soaring in 1978 while a graduate student, first at Garland Pack's soaring school in Eagleville, Tennessee, and later, while a postdoctoral fellow, in the high California desert at Pearblossom and Tehachapi, California. Then I became an assistant professor and gave up soaring for 15 years while 'career building.' It's great to be back to flying! My hobbies include photography and gardening. I found MITSA through your listing in the SSA directory and by locating your web page, courtesy of Guenther Eichhorn. I look forward to meeting you all on the flight line someday."

Dan Berard says he learned about the club as a result of the feature article that was published in the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*. He had seen gliding in Maine and New Hampshire since childhood, so when he saw the article, he thought he'd give it a try, and he was hooked. So far, he's been to the field three weekends in a row.

Rick MacMillan says he found the club through the SSA's soaring directory. Rick started flying six years ago with the Derbyshire and Lancashire club at Camphill near Manchester, England where he flew mostly K-17s and K-7s. Winch launches were only to 900 feet, which made for a short flight if you didn't find lift quickly, but there was ridge soaring next to the field with wave and thermals year round. Rick moved back to New Jersey when his assignment in England ended. He continued his flying at Wurtsboro, New York, and he got his private certificate there last year. He is now living in Keene, New Hampshire and has been flying with Skip Kemmer's commercial operation at Springfield, Vermont, but now he is looking for a club to join. Rick is the chief financial officer for Troy Mills, a textile manufacturer in Troy, New Hampshire.

And *Steve Kazan* has rejoined as a tow pilot.

Sugarbush encampment: Carl Johnson (jink@tiac.net) made the following proposal in an email message this week. "I'm starting to think about another wave encampment at Sugarbush on or around the Columbus day weekend. If the board of directors agrees, we could bring a L-23 up on the night of Friday, October 10, and bring it back on Sunday, October 19. This would give us two full weekends at Sugarbush, with the week in between available for anyone who wants to take some vacation time. Please let me know if you're interested in going. If there's enough interest, perhaps we could also take one of the single place gliders."

God and country, and also glider club: Al Gold has asked me to remind the club that the board of directors has decided that everyone at the level of solo student or higher should serve as an instructor, tow pilot, or duty officer. The only exceptions to this rule are members performing some other demanding service for the club. When Al makes up the duty roster, he will assign all rated instructors and tow pilots to their respective tasks. All other pilots, including private owners, will be assigned regular turns as DOs.

Golf carts: Please remember that the golf carts do not have an "idle" feature. Please do not leave your foot on the gas when the cart is stationary. It fouls the spark plug.

Above and beyond

Rob Playter

Please say "thank you" to the following people who have gone above and beyond the call of duty this month for the club:

1. Bill Brine donated an audio vario for the L-33
2. John Wren and Michael Welles installed the audio vario in the L-33
3. Steve Glow installed an audio vario in N117BB
4. Carl Johnson, Bruce Easom, and Ken Gassett installed new wing tie-downs for an L-23
5. Carl Johnson, Bruce Easom, and Ken Gassett installed one new wing tie-down for the 1-34
6. Rob Playter mowed the grass under the gliders
7. Rob Playter installed wheel platforms for an L-23
8. Karl Krueger fixed a canopy pin on N118BB
9. Ian Clark bought a used golf cart
10. Mike Baxa started reorganizing office

If you would like to help out, here some examples of jobs waiting for volunteers:

1. build wing tie-downs for the 1-26, 1-34, and L-33
2. build tail-wheel tie-down for an L-23
3. wash and wax all gliders
4. install an audio vario in N118BB

As always, talk to our director of maintenance (Jim Emken) before modifying or repairing club equipment.

The “other” joys of soaring

Mike Baxa

Our sport offers a lot of different rewards and pleasures, such as the joy of out-thermaling your buddy who missed the bubble you are gleefully climbing in while he heads for the deck, the happiness of landing back at the field late Sunday evening while knowing others are making retrieve calls from New Hampshire, the satisfaction in driving to the field after weaseling out on your wife after her planned social/family event because, “It has been a rough week and I was really hoping to relax and fly this weekend.” (This usually works for me, but you have to start acting tired and stressed by Wednesday evening, so by Friday she’ll suggest you go flying and actually believe it was her idea.)

Another fun aspect is being able to visit other operations around the country when on business or vacation. I always learn something new, meet interesting people and it beats the heck out of blowing a day doing something unproductive, such as working, your sister’s wedding, etc. This season I have visited three sites out west and will share a few highlights.

Crystal Soaring is east of Palmdale, California. (If God gave you a choice between being condemned for eternity in Palmdale or Hell, you would want to think long and hard before deciding.) Retired Navy Captain Watkins is the owner/operator and has an aviation trophy room that Chuck Yeager would envy. The day I was there, a pilot was working on his 16th diamond distance flight trying to reach his goal of 20 diamond flights in one season. Yes, the soaring is probably better in the west. They have a two-seater Fox aerobatic glider and that was why I was there. There are only two in the country. Unfortunately, because I was wearing very heavy shoes that day, I was 25 pounds over the weight limit.

Skylark North is located at Mountain Valley Airport in Tehachapi, California. Larry and Jane Barrett own and operate this commercial site and have all the flying toys, including an ASK-21. Being a solid Grob 103 fan, I was very impressed and will also add one of these to my personal fleet as soon as I can convince the family that tent living can be fun. It is a beautiful machine requiring very light control input. An interesting geographic feature as relayed by Dale Masters, staff CFIG, is the wind shear lift effect at Tehachapi. Between the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Tehachapi Mountains, the winds literally collide into one another and rise upward along a 200 mile line. This wind shear lift effect is right next to the airport and is strong and turbulent. Once I got into it, it was a matter of staying on the peak point and using tight thermal like turns to climb straight up. By the way, Dale used to be an instructor at Stowe before moving west. On one visit I chatted awhile with an older gentleman working on his “Schweizer 1-24.” My reaction was the same as yours: “What’s a 1-24?” He is the original owner, and only one was made, and it has a wing span longer than the 1-23. He and Ernie Schweizer built it together in 1949 and he flys it every weekend. Talk about walking soaring history.

Estrella Sailport now called Arizona Soaring outside of Phoenix, Arizona was founded by Les Horvath in 1978. It is, to my thinking, the ultimate in a first-class commercial operation. It sits a few miles from 4,000 foot mountain ridges and very close to Phoenix Class B airspace. I had many flights at Estrella, but never hit the right conditions, assuming I would recognize the “right conditions” if I blundered into them. Their glider hangar includes a long list of new and old toys, including a fleet — yes, I said fleet — of Grob 103s. They have three 5,000 foot parallel runways to choose from for those who like to keep their options open once turning onto final. Off-field landings in this desert translates to glider crunch time. What appears to be clear landable terrain from altitude in the bright Arizona sun is usually washed out dry river beds with deep ruts. Tom Allen, staff CFIG, is a mortician by training and an A+ instructor. I just hope you don’t have to be good at one to be good at the other.

Next time you are going somewhere, think about visiting a club or operation in that area. You will always learn something new.

World record attempt

Mark Koepper

One day a few weeks back, the soaring forecast looked reasonably good, so I had a go at a 100 kilometer speed triangle. Blistering the course at 31 mph, I narrowly missed the world record, coming up just 115 mph shy of Jim Payne’s 146 mph flight this March.

That speed is, however, good enough for a Massachusetts state record in sports class. I’m now testing the premise that the start height may be documented using the barogram and there is no need for a calibrated start gate with multiple observers.

Whether or not my documentation is sufficient for the SSA, I’m looking forward to going around faster. On two attempts since, I have not even been able to stay airborne to get away from the field. So with the days getting weaker even this low hurdle has been a challenge, which I guess is the whole point anyway.

Powered flight

Michael Welles

This spring I began taking lessons in plane with an engine up front — there, I admit it. I've been flying out of the Marlboro (9B1) airport, which has been an experience in its own right. Marlboro is a small, one-runway strip (32/14) about 1,700 feet long with a significant looking 50-foot pine forest at the south end of the field. Though I now work near Hanscom, I've continued my initial training at Marlboro because of the short-field experience and thrill of seeing how close to the trees I am on a nice 80F+ degree day with high density altitude and instructor on board. On those days it is really nice when you can kick the instructor out of the plane.

Early on I was plagued by bad spring weather, very windy days, most of which seem to have the added effect of blustery crosswind landings at Marlboro. Only once have I seen a good breeze right down 32. This, of course, has the effect of building character and good side-slip technique, even on take-off.

On my second flight, my instructor, knowing I was a glider pilot, vectored me to the vicinity of Sterling, and then with little warning, cut the power and said, "Think you can find a good place to land?" Of course, this ended up being the oh-so-familiar Sterling 34. However, the sink rate of a 150 is a bit different than even a Blanik, but I did manage to get us on the ground without much problem.

So, what have a learned since I began flying at Marlboro? Well, for one, I've learned that the rotating mass up front really does weird things to the plane depending on what you are asking it to do. The first day I flew in simulated instrument conditions I found my normally somewhat accurate directional control was shot to hell as my instructor alternately asked me to ascend to 3,000 feet or descent to 2,000 feet, because of the torque effects. Second, even with the minimum radio work, there is more load on the pilot during the landing sequence. My last few flights I've been using a borrowed headset (thanks, Ian), but before that it was speaker and hand-held microphone. It took me a while to get the hang of announcing each leg (especially the turn to final) as I was grabbing for the mic, watching airspeed, and getting the flaps down all at the same time. A push button on the wheel is a lot easier!

Finally, flying a 150 is teaching me that you can fly when "sky's are gray." There is nothing like soaring, nothing like the opportunity to cheat mother nature for a few hours on a weekend afternoon where the game is finding the next thermal, watching where a red-tailed hawk is headed, or checking out new territory. But even a plane with petrol coursing through its system has its merits when it comes to getting somewhere with more reliable accuracy. I've now got an hour of solo time and soon hope to start my cross-country work. And you know the best thing, there is still so much more to learn, be it powered flight or not. See you 'round the field.

The MITSA Board of Directors

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For more information about MITSA, you can contact the club by email, visit our web page, or contact Joe Kwasnik, our director of membership listed above.

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Wanted: a few good pilots

Bill Brine

You have seen the blue Citabria tow plane, probably towed behind it, and may realize that MITSA stores it's heavy equipment in it's hangar. But who owns it? How much does the club pay to rent it? And why do we, the club, need it? Three years ago, eight MITSA members formed 3B3 Inc. and purchased a 1978 Belancia 7GCAA Citabria with a tow hook installed. They rent the T-hangar from the airport. MITSA pays $65 wet (with fuel) per tach hour and is allowed to store golf carts and other stuff for free in the Citabria hangar.

The shareholders feel that it is vital to the life of a soaring club to have tow capacity available to meet tow demand. Each shareholder has sacrificed his use of the Citabria during spring weekends and times when the Cessna is down in order for the club to operate efficiently. The $65 per hour covers the direct operating cost of the Citabria (fuel and oil at $25 hour) and contributes to the indirect costs (MITSA operations account for about 7% of the annual cost of insuring, hangar rent, and maintaining the tow plane).

The shareholders of 3B3 share the use of the Citabria when it is not towing gliders. Each pays $25 per hour wet and $125 per month to cover fixed expenses and the mortgage.

The last year has been a very bad year for 3B3 financially. Three of the original eight shareholders moved away or retired from flying, 3B3 repurchased their shares, and lost the monthly income from them as well. In the spring, the MITSA board advanced 3B3 flying fees to help pay it's insurance bill. MITSA, due to no fault of its own, has not flown off the cost of the insurance. Winter is a slow income time for any flying operation and the remaining owners of 3B3 are unwilling to continue to support the plane's operation alone. 3B3 needs three pilots who share in our devotion to MITSA and want to fly a fun and inexpensive-to-operate airplane. Each share in 3B3 is valued at $2,500 and only three shares will be sold. Please contact John Wren, president of 3B3 Inc., if you are interested in purchasing a share in this great airplane. If at its October meeting the three remaining shares are unsold, the board of 3B3 is likely to place the Citabria up for sale. Don't let this happen. Call John at (508) 244-0647.

The future of New England soaring

Bob Fletcher

Bob Fletcher is concerned about the fact that soaring activity is slowly being pushed away from metropolitan areas like Boston. Controlled airspace is growing. Airports are closing. Something needs to be done to establish a permanent soaring site within easy driving distance of Boston.

After discussing matters with the board, Bob has started looking into two initiatives:

1. The co-location of operations and possible merger of several clubs in the area such as the MIT Soaring Association and the Greater Boston Soaring Club in order to form a soaring organization that has the economies and buying power of a large soaring organization.

2. The creation of a company for the purpose of buying property like the Sterling airport for a permanent soaring site, a company modeled after the Granite Intersection company that was organized to purchase the Warren/Sugarbush airport in the early sixties.

The progress so far has been encouraging. Greater Boston has created a committee to investigate the possibility of co-locating operations. The Sterling airport is in favor of their move to Sterling and would be prepared to make field improvements to facilitate joint operations. Roy Bourgeois has agreed to help establish a company like Granite. The Sterling airport owner is considering the possibility of a sale to such a company. And, so far, nine people have expressed interest in investing $10,000 for a share of the airport company, and many of them are not even MITSA members.

Bob says, "I feel that the next 30 years will be critical for the future of our sport. We have to be prepared to meet the challenges even if they require some new ideas. A great impediment to Massachusetts soaring is the fact that the gliding clubs have not united to their common benefit and hence have no long-term soaring facilities. We need permanent facilities where we can make changes that will make it attractive to bring our families out for the day, and introduce our children to the sport. In general, we need to attract new younger members, perhaps on scholarships, perhaps on workfare. I hope you will see fit to join us in funding a permanent site."