

Off Tow Newsletter

Puget Sound Soaring Association, Inc.

Editor: Dave Kremers

September-October, 2006

Seattle, WA

Upcoming Events:

Would you believe that the season is already winding down? It's gone by far too quickly. But don't believe that the best soaring is behind us. As we know, there will be plenty of good flying ahead in the days before we have to call it quits for another year. This is a time when we'll be getting some unstable air (read: cumulus clouds) as well as a good time for students to be working to get in those valuable flights toward solo or that treasured ticket.

Recent Events:

The **annual PSSA summer picnic** was a big success again. At least there were many flights and much food and conviviality - what more could we ask for? We got to talk with old friends, and made some new ones as a number of people showed for demo rides. Many thanks to Stefan Perrin who honchoed the whole affair and served admirably as 'Burger Chef'. Also thanks to Joe Salz for again offering his trailer rig for the day.



Great flying



Great company



...and then there was this strange sighting!.
Are there any entomologists in the group?
We'd like to identify this large insect if possible
. It could be dangerous..

The summer away from Bergseth

It seems the fates were ag'in us this year. With the exception of several of us making it over to Ephrata to join up with the Willamette club in the week following Memorial Day, our other plans dissolved due to various factors. Work and family contingencies depleted the numbers and blocked our plans to fly at Montague so we were left with intermittent sorties to EPH to get our cross country jollies

. J.C. Hauchecorne did make the trek to Marfa, TX to compete in the World Class competition there in his PW-5 (his report on that adventure follows) and Charlie Long made EPH his base for the summer. Otherwise, Dave Kremers and Wayne Ginther got in some licks on the plateau over Grant County on one exceptional weekend in August. We'll have to wait until next year to get our plans together for some new Hot'n High adventures.

Cross Country efforts at Bergseth

Your editor has announced an interest in promoting more cross country efforts in our own vicinity of Bergseth. An outline of how we can get that started has been presented and the only thing left to do is to get out there and do it.

Should we be surprised, then, that our own Kenji Ominato, local L-13 ace, has taken the challenge and made one of the first reported triangles tasks over the Enumclaw area.

In addition, Tim Heneghan has been out probing the Enumclas - Buckley environs. Also, just recently Kenji and your editor went for an ariel survey of the Evergreen field in the Blanik and returned the following weekend, he in the Blanik and I in the Cirrus, at an altitude never exceeding 3,300' and determined we could have pushed on to points further west with Evergreen as our new "home" airport.

These first tentative efforts should be followed by a more calculated program to raise our group's confidence in making further such forays. This means holding a short field landing clinic, land and tow-out trips to local airports for familiarity. and cross country competitions within the club to encourage more to get involved. There is still time, weather permitting, before the close of the season to get some of this done.

Soaring Safety Survey

Another more recent event was a valuable visit paid to PSSA by Burt Compton of the Soaring Safety Foundation. He kindly included us on a swing through the Northwest visiting several clubs to offer a totally discreet critique of our club's safety culture. All who were present on Saturday, September 16th,

had the chance to freely exchange ideas with Burt about how we can make our operation even safer than it now is. He had compliments for our operation and had many helpful ideas and experiences to share with us which board members were very glad to receive that I'm sure we will be implementing in our operations in the future.

Here's a follow-up article by Safety and Training Officer, J.C. Hauchecorne:

Safety Corner:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who came out to the field on September 16th. I knew no one would be able to resist the temptation to be towed by yours truly to that magical cloud. It is true, one or two pilots did not find the magic right away, but that is because they did not believe in it.

Kidding aside, I think we all enjoyed the opportunity to chat with Burt Compton from the SSA Safety Council about our operations.

The overall impression from Burt is that we are running a "fine" operation. He was especially impressed (scared?) by our take offs and landings through the V at the west end of the field. His comment about the aircraft carrier approach is a very important comment. We are so used to our field, that we sometimes forget how special our field and our operations are. This is something we need to keep in mind as we brief new pilots to our field, but also something we need to keep in mind for our take offs and landings. We don't have much room for error on take offs and landings. For me as a tow pilot, the period from the minute I leave the ground, just before the windsock, and the point where I clear the trees on the north side of the field leaves no room for drifting or being flip about turbulence. Those few seconds demand very precise piloting by the tow pilot and the glider pilot.

Of course, once we are airborne, the next question is the emergency field. Burt's opinion about the emergency field straight ahead was evasive. When I probed him more closely about his thoughts, he was not impressed and thought the emergency field to the North offered a better chance to make a safe landing. This is something we need to keep in mind next time we evaluate our emergency option. Burt's recommendation regarding moving the tow rope pin raised our awareness of the burn marks on the plastic pin wondering how it affects the rope. One important suggestion was the location of an emergency rescue box with tools such as a fire extinguisher, ax, wire and bolt cutters and a first aid kit. I think those items are important to have on hand in case of an emergency, and we will have them on our field by the next season.

I had a chance to talk to Burt about the proposed "local rules". He did not want to comment on any specific items, but did indicate that every glider operation he visited did have some local rules in place.

At the last board meeting, the President did appoint a committee to review the proposed rules and make recommendations on how to proceed. If all goes right, we will have the new guidelines in place that will satisfy the FAA requirement and our needs.

JC

Board News:

Like most, if not all of you, the Board of Directors would like to see PSSA have a single seat glider online. A single seat glider will help to both retain existing members and to draw new members to the club.

PSSA needs a glider that meets two basic, but very different needs. Number one, it needs to be a glider that can easily transition new glider pilots to single seat flying directly from PSSA's existing two seat glider(s). Number two, the glider should spark the interest of more experienced pilots, encouraging them to fly more, and fly farther.

Over the past year the Board has considered many different gliders with the final consensus being that a relatively modern, mid performance glider is the way to go. Gliders such as a Blanik L-33, PW-5,

SZD 51 Junior are the category of glider felt to be best suited for the job. The Board has rejected the idea of purchasing an older, lower performance glider such as a Schweitzer 1-26 simply in the interest of keeping the cost of flying low. This Board is of the opinion that PSSA should move more toward modern day equipment.

Used gliders (including trailer) in the target category are typically in the low to mid twenty thousand dollar range. Not cheap, but certainly not expensive by today's standards. I'm confident PSSA can raise enough money from members to purchase a glider in this price range. However, looking at flight statistics from the past several years raises concern as to whether or not the glider will fly enough to service the debt. Does this mean PSSA shouldn't own a single seat glider? No, it does not, it simply means we need to be a little more creative in coming up with a way to make it happen. At the Board meeting held on October 5th a basic outline of an alternative way of funding glider operations was presented. The majority of the Board felt the proposal had merit and requested that it be presented in detail to both the Board and the full membership.

In the near future you will be receiving the full details of that proposal. Your input and response to the plan are very important. Please take the time to review it, give it some thought, and respond.

Regards,

Tim Heneghan
President –Puget Sound Soaring Association

Reports from Members:

Along with our ongoing discussion about single seat glider replacement and what kind of aircraft is best suited for our club members comes this item from J.C. Hauchecorne - something to ponder.

Rent? Buy? or...?

This article is trying to shed light on what makes more sense; owning a glider, renting a glider, or entering into a partnership.

When you sit down and analyze the pros and cons, the answer will be very obvious.

Flying is expensive. It costs a great deal of money, and a huge time commitment to get your license. As soon as you get your license you realize this license only represents your right to learn. It will take another great personal time commitment (and a great deal of money) to become a proficient pilot. This is true for your glider license or your private license.

How long does it take to become a reasonable soaring pilot capable to go XC? My answer is years of flying every weekend, especially up here in the NW where the prime soaring season is so very short. Let's assume you have 2 soaring seasons as a licensed pilot behind you, and it's getting boring flying the ol' Blanik around the sky. Now you start to dream. You also make that fatal mistake of taking out receipts to calculate how much flying really costs. You estimate one hour of flying in the ol' Blanik costs you about \$70, if you're flying 50 hours per year. This includes your tow (\$30 on average), your rental, cost of staying current, yearly membership in the club etc. If you are only flying one hour per year, the cost of this hour is in excess of \$500. Yup, your fixed cost, the yearly membership fee, is collected no matter what.

If you go to a commercial operation where the rental of a glider is around \$40 to \$50 per hour, plus this and that, your cost will quickly add up to about \$100 per hour.

There are some great advantages when you are renting a glider. If the club has a great deal of inventory, you can gain experience in all kinds of gliders. If you go to a commercial operation, you can even specify the time of your take off. You simply arrive at the airport and your glider is on the line ready to go, just do a few stretching exercises and off you go. After you've completed several hundred miles of XC flying you come back to the airport, land, and as soon as you have finished your roll out, the golf cart is there to pick you up and drive you to the club house where hors d'oeuvres and a cold beer awaits you. No worries about tying down the glider, the crew takes care of that.

But there are some drawbacks. In our club, you are limited to one hour of flying. This is clearly not enough to get you rocking. It's not unusual to take 30 minutes or so to get familiar with the weather mood of the day, and before you are really comfortable with what is happening in this three dimensional chess game, you have to pull the spoilers and get down. With the one hour limit it will take much longer to become a proficient XC pilot. If you rent different ships, it takes a while to become familiar with each particular ship, and even if you have an open afternoon, it most likely will take several flights before you become familiar with that ship. Except of course, if you rent a PW-5, but we'll talk about that later. I also believe if you are a serious soaring pilot, getting into your cockpit is like putting on a glove. Your glider has to fit you like a glove, or more likely, a body suit. In the winter I spend hours in my cockpit, custom fitting my feel for the glider. Clearly this is not possible in a rented glider.

Looking at the pros and cons, I think you will never excel in soaring as long as you rent a glider. But how about George Moffat, the famous US glider pilot, who throughout his career borrowed or rented most of his gliders. Even George spent countless hours refining, with cooperation of the owner, the ship he was to fly at a given championship. At some point in your soaring career, just renting a high performance ship from a commercial outfit may become an option. But by this time you must be a well seasoned pilot.

So the logical alternative to renting a glider is to own a glider. The first question is what to buy? If the answer to that question is the latest and greatest, LS10 for example, or what the heck, let's get something in the 18 m class with an M directly from the factory, I don't even want to talk to you. But if you have to stick to a budget, like most of us, you most likely will be looking at 20 plus years old whatever. This is OK! This ship will get you many years of enjoyment, and a crack at many XC miles. But more important, you can fly it whenever, where ever, how ever long. It's yours! You can customize it, you can polish it, and over time you will know every ache, every scratch, and every sound this bird makes. Ownership has its bride, but it also has its challenges; maintenance, upkeep, storing etc. Don't take it lightly. Don't think you can leave your glass ship in the box sitting outside during our wet winter months without some precautions. You will get a nasty surprise in the spring. So what does it cost to have your own plane? Obviously, there is the capital investment. Let's say we get something like a Discus, relatively simple, standard class ship, with a good performance. One of the earlier ships should be available for around \$40k, with trailer (On Wings & Wheels: 1985 Discus, 2,200 hours, \$34k). Add the tax, the winglet mod, \$40k. \$40k is a lot of money for a glider, but let me put a different spin on that investment. Let's say you buy it for \$40k, and you think you will keep it for 5 years, than sell it. If you take reasonable care, no accidents, you should be able to get \$20k when you sell it. Your capital depreciation is \$4k per year, if you fly 100 hours this bird will cost you \$40 per hour. Plus, plus, plus, insurance, annual, storage, tie down, in no time we are looking again at \$100 per flight hour, let's be honest, most likely \$125 per hour. Yes, owning your glider is more expensive than renting the Blanik, no question. But it will be more or less a wash when you are renting a single seat glider. Here is the upside. Unlimited flying! You will actually learn how to fly XC in a fraction of the time it would take in a rental glider. And yes, it's a glass ship with decent performance!

But here is the caveat; your goal is to fly 100 hours plus per year.

So what happens if you're family and professional commitment does not allow you to fly 100 hours plus per year. There is an alternative! Fractional ownership!

Fractional ownership is the answer for glider enthusiasts that are committed to the sport, but have some limitations on how much flying they can do.

Let's take that same Discus at \$40k. Let's take the same capital depreciation over 5 years, and let's assume 4 pilots are in on the deal. This glider costs you \$1,000 per year. Can you envision flying 40 hours per year? That is 20 flights at 2 hours? I think you can. The capital cost of this glider per hour is now \$25! That \$1000 insurance invoice is \$6.25 per hour. Yes the club costs, the tow, your personal upkeep is the same, but I think, you will be looking at a cost per flight hour below of what the Blanik is costing you right now! Think about it! Blanik – Discus...

If you've got the soaring bug, and the Blanik is no longer appealing to you, you're best solution is a partnership in a glider.

Report from Marfa, TX:

J.C. now tells us about what it's like to compete at one of the big national contests over some of the most challenging territory in the U.S..

Marfa Texas:

I have been soaring since 1973 and in my "Soaring Career" I have been to many unusual locations. Marfa Texas ranks very high in the category of "unusual" locations.

Marfa is a little town with just over 2,000 inhabitants, about 100 miles south of highway 10, in southwestern Texas. What is unusual about Marfa are the extremes. In one end of town you can get a meal and a beer for under \$10, but just a few blocks up on Main Street you go to a place and the minute you step in, you think you have wandered through a time portal and you are now on Madison Avenue, in downtown New York. Clean and cool, waiters in white aprons serving a well dressed crowd, excellent wine list, great food, from the appetizer through the main course to the dessert. Everything is absolutely fresh, and I have tasted some of the best Pacific Salmon right there in the middle of the desert. Of course, the price is also very much in line with any upscale Manhattan restaurant.

What also surprised me is the flying hardware. You could be in the middle of the desert, and suddenly you notice an 8,000 foot paved runway, with a hangar that houses Turbine King Air's, Lear's whatever.

So here we are in Marfa TX, one of the premium soaring sites in the southwest, with a ton of soaring history. If you ever have an opportunity, watch the movie "The Sun Ship Game". It's a documentary about the US Nationals, I think in the late 60's or early 70's. It appears those were the days soaring pilots were made of the "real" stuff. They would do anything to get the extra mile, even if it meant landing in downtown Marfa.

Marfa is located on a high desert plateau. The altitude at the airport is 4,850 feet, with mountains to the North climbing to 8,000 feet, and the Rio Grande to the South, about 150 miles or so. The plateau tips in general to the South, with the draining canyons heading in that direction. It's a great place to fly; the emphasis is placed on flying, not landing. The general landscape is uncultivated grazing land. Landable, yes; survivable, yes; but rough. A better alternative is the highway. Just think of it as three dimensional merging. Cars merge from the right on to the highway, gliders from above, no big deal. Actually, it's not, and the highway patrol is very tolerant with this additional highway traffic. When I had to land on the highway, I had the good fortune that such a tolerant officer stopped, and directed the traffic around us while we disassembled the glider.

I forgot how much fun it is to compete. I use to compete aggressively in hang gliders, but until this year I have never competed in a glider. My objective was to go to Marfa, check out what's happening with the PW-5 class, be disappointed, come back to the NW, sell my PeeWee and get something bigger and better and faster and sexier.

After flying with my "brothers and sisters" for two weeks, I came to the conclusion, there is no better class to fly than the PW-5. It is extremely sobering, flying right next to a PeeWee approaching a turn point, same sink rate, same speed, making the turn and heading back towards goal, reading the sky, deciding on a route, only to find out, that my "brother" choose a different route and beat me by 10 minutes. It's not the machine; it's the pilot that makes all the difference. I truly love that philosophy. More than ever, I have decided to commit to the World Class. Racing in a PeeWee is a lot of fun, just because the equipment is irrelevant. It's the pilot!



The starting Grid

Talking about the pilot, this pilot has a long way to go. Boy am I slow. I did complete most of the tasks, but consistently slower. Well, there is an easy fix for that, right? Buy a faster glider. Oh, I forgot. Not in this class. I guess I will have to push the nose over a bit more aggressively.

The flying weather in Marfa was not that great. The two practice days were good, with a cloud base of close to 18,000 feet. Once the competition started the weather deteriorated. The first two days were good, but then we got a lot of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, and we had to deal with flying in heavy over-developments, rain, thunder and lightning.



I think I'd better file IFR

There were a few days coming back from the turn point where I found myself looking at a black wall, and running out of ideas on how to fly around it. I have never flown in so much rain. There were several times I was climbing in a thermal at 5 knots in heavy rain. I normally try to give those heavy cumulonimbus shelves a wide margin, but it turns out, some of the best lift is right there, but so is the lightning and rain. Sometimes, the route around those cells led over some very hostile countryside, canyons, inaccessible plateaus etc. With the short legs of a PeeWee that can be very intimidating. Most of the time we made it home, or close to home. There was only one real long retrieve, with a story of getting stuck in the sand, engine stopped working, flat tire, finally getting home at 3 am. What would soaring be without those stories, just another boring afternoon stroll in the park.

The crew:

Maybe it's the easy assembly, maybe it's the cute look, but somehow PW-5's are loved by the crew. Most of the pilot's crew was their wife, and yes they loved the PeeWee. Look how a pilot is treated on the ground:



I don't know what it is, but if you want your partner to get involved in the sport of soaring, you will need a PW-5



Here is a picture of Charlie, the CD and the crew. Audrey had fun, for a change she was not the only crew on the airport. Nancy Snead, the lady with the red T-shirt was the seasoned crew expert. I told Audrey, do whatever she does. If she hooks the trailer up, you hook up, just follow her. That crew strategy worked out very well. By the end of the contest, Audrey knew in the morning what kind of day it would be, will she have a leisure day at the pool in the shade, or will she have to hustle and chase me.

Marfa was a challenging place to fly. PW-5 pilots are extremely friendly and social on the ground, just about every night we went out for dinner together. But in the air, watch out!

Next year the Nationals will be in Tennessee, and yes, Audrey and I are planning to be there.

J.C.

Operations:

This the point when we remind everyone that the end of the season's operations means the beginning of the winter maintenance down time. And that means we will need to break down the gliders onto their trailers for movement to their storage. Let's all plan to be available on that last day of operation to join in the task. Remember, many hands make light work! Stefan Perrin will be making an announcement to remind us and give particulars, so keep tuned and put it on your calendar.