

Soaring & Motorgliding Magazine

Editor's Report

Eric Bick

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Overview

The magazine is running smoothly. Articles and photos are being submitted at a sustainable pace. It has been possible to lay out a schedule for upcoming articles in such a way as to make them, in many cases, timely as to the time of year soaring conditions. The Feature Article schedule is currently laid out for about 4 months in advance, along with some of the Departments. This has enabled the editor, assistant editor, and art director to get the magazine to the printer timely each month. I think the quality of the magazine as to contributed articles and photos to generally be of interest to the membership.

There continues to be some, but very little, feedback from membership regarding content, pro or con. We have moved from an era of personal communication to social network communicating, often in 20 words or less. Members spend more time on RAS writing short comments about a variety of topics than take the time to compose a letter to the editor of a magazine. This might well be due to response time. Social media provide near-instantaneous responses from a multitude, while letters to the editor appear two months out with quick response only from the editor. Therefore, we tend to see letters regarding specific topics related to article contents when an error is perceived.

The editorial staff consists of the Editor (contract employee to SSA), Assistant Editor (Brienna Bick, hired and paid for by Editor), and Art Director (Kevin O'Brien, contract employee to SSA, who does the layout and produces some of the artwork). All three are on a part-time basis. The three of us work very well together. By having a production schedule with articles laid out in advance, we're able to incorporate last minute changes that often pop up. Brienna is the workhorse behind making sure articles conform to our style guide, read well, and are typo free. Kevin does wonders with the layouts, enhancing the reader experience. Between Brienna's and Kevin's efforts, I have more time to go soaring, as well as focus on future content of the magazine.

Additionally, Rollin Hasness regularly provides the Badges and Records section of the magazine, with Melinda Hughes in Hobbs providing updates on A, B, C, and Bronze badges. Melinda also takes care of the calendar, and classified and page ads that appear in the magazine. All of these are important to our members, and to advertisers. We strive to make them accurate, and without

grammatical and spelling errors (interesting how many “professional” ads come in with poor spelling or grammar). We have worked out procedures with each that enable a smooth input each month for editing and layout. Kayla Owens, who takes care of many membership tasks, gets the updated mailing list to the printer each month. Under Denise Layton’s leadership, the team is functioning smoothly, ensuring members get their copies of the magazine each month, either through the mail or their computer.

Past Year

Features

Contest Reports:

Contest reports are a mainstay over the year. Not all contests submit reports, but I think the quality of these reports is improving. Rather than regurgitating daily standings, authors have been taking to summarizing the results and focusing more on what happens in preparing and competing. We sometimes get some of our better photos from contests, since they offer so many photo ops. We are also getting articles on international and aerobatic competitions. A small percentage of all soaring pilots get to compete at these levels, but they can vicariously experience flying in another country, or sweat it out with an aerobatic pilot. We also got the Juniors’ competition in a special issue.

Hall of Fame Short Biographies by Bertha Ryan:

Not everyone cares about these, but they bring back fond memories for many members. They also are a way to introduce the younger SSA members to those who paved the way for our sport, as well as insight into the history of soaring.

Glider/Motorglider performance reports

Sigh. Despite my and Denise Layton’s efforts, we simply aren’t getting any. *Gliding International* does have glider performance reports, but they pay for them. I am, however, pleased to note that the March 2018 issue has an article and pilot’s report on the HP-24. I also have a promise for a pilot’s report on the Ventus Sport FES toward the end of 2018. I believe most members, whether they loved them or not, looked forward to Dick Johnson’s reports, and they still serve as references for those buying a glider. Any help we can get in this area to get at least pilot’s reports will be appreciated.

Soaring Soarfaris/Personal experiences

We get a number of these. I prefer the ones that take us to new places, places where we might never get the chance to soar. We’ve had articles on soaring in New Zealand, for example. I think these help to open up our eyes to other opportunities.

Departments

We've lost some, added some, and have some continuing.

Soaring Rx

Lost: Dr. Dan Johnson has had other focuses in his life, and writing a monthly column on medical matters requires substantial research. I have talked with him about updating older articles. In lieu of Dr. Johnson resuming, I'd like someone to find another contributor for this topic.

Weather

Lost: Had one article from Walt Rogers about the current crop of soaring weather forecasting tools (XCSSkies, TopMeteo, SkySight). Weather is what soaring pilots live by, so it would be good for someone to step up to take on this topic once again. Topics might include interpreting Skew-T diagrams, cause and avoidance of gust fronts, interpretation of the various tool outputs, and so on.

SSF

Continuing: Rich Carlson and the SSF trustees contribute monthly. Looking for upcoming articles on risk management

Teaching Soaring

Lost (for now): Tom Knauff stepped up for a couple of years. I have a tentative promise for a restart using simulation based training as an integral part. I hope to wrap that up at the convention.

Personalities in Soaring

New: I periodically get articles on interesting individuals in our sport that are still living. We have guidelines for obituaries as to who might be included. This is a bit different, recognizing people who have made soaring easier or more enjoyable for others, or who have interesting life stories, and are still contributing.

Club Corner

New: Interestingly, we don't get much in the way of inputs from clubs – but occasionally one comes in. Many of these describe what a particular club has done to get members to go cross-country soaring, or to get new members.

Glider Aerodynamic Puzzler – Steve Platt

New: This is actually something a “Teaching Soaring” substitute. Steve Platt is a CFI-G and is providing every other month puzzlers, along with answers, for readers to go over. They range from basic to more advanced topics. Not clear how long this will continue, but I expect through 2018.

OLC – Bill Hill

New: Bill has written about what OLC is, of his own OLC-posted flights, and those of others, with occasional contributions from others. There is a question about how many topics there are to write about here, so we’ll have to see whether this continues. A key point is that there is something to be learned from looking at others’ flights on OLC. We’ve also included the Combs trophy updates here for straight out flights.

Sky Writing

Somewhat New: Jay Campbell is editor of this department. Poems do come in and some members like to read them. We’ve added limericks and “Burma Soar” (for old-timers) to inject some humor. The challenge always is getting submittals.

XC Tips – Garret Willat

New: These are a direct lift from the Wings & Wheels weekly e-letter. The focus tends to be on racing, but overall, the topics apply to cross-country soaring in general. We have received positive letters re this department and will continue it so long as Garret writes it.

Soaring Stories – Dale Masters

Continuing: Dale is one of soaring’s more prolific writers. Though retired from CFI-Ging now, he continues to write interesting anecdotes from his times soaring at a variety of locations. We receive positive feedback re Dale’s contributions.

Milestones

A continuing cornerstone of the magazine. Members probably request more copies of any particular issue based on being in “Milestones” than any other feature.

Repairs, Maintenance, and Upgrades

Continuing/Sporadic: I receive articles that I put into this Department in an attempt to attract more articles. I think it could be an important one, but much of what would be covered in the magazine tends to be covered in user groups. For example, there are many discussions of

Schleicher and DG motorglider maintenance, repairs, and upgrades on-line. Likewise, the Recreational Aviation Soaring website occasionally has useful discussions related to this topic.

Future

1. Motorgliders are becoming an ever larger segment of soaring, so I'm planning on getting more motorglider articles, including one of my own on transitioning to a motorglider.
2. Would still like to get more technical articles in the magazine, or articles on operating some of the more sophisticated instruments we are now finding in sailplanes. It has been suggested that the primary equipment retailers (W&W, Cumulus Soaring, Craggy Aero) be asked to provide articles. I have asked in the past, and they are generally reluctant to provide articles. I suspect this is partly because they put a lot of time and effort into their own websites, and writing accurate articles is a lot of work.
3. We are undergoing a transition in airspace management – NexGen, ADS-B, drone density, etc. While much of this does not appear to directly impact soaring, some of it does, particularly from a safety perspective. SSA generally follows the lead of AOPA and EAA in these matters, with their larger membership and resources. However, I don't think this relieves SSA of providing information and education for soaring pilots on topics such as ADS-B. To do so requires expert input and explanation in straightforward terms – not easy to do.
4. The printed and soft copy magazines are currently one and the same. Members have indicated that they really like the soft copy, but there are those who have no interest in a digital version, preferring hands-on. The current approach of producing a digital edition falls out of publishing the hard copy because of modern printing processes. The digital copy offers advantages over the hard copy, such as embedded links that can be followed. There are further enhancements that could be part of a digital edition, but would require additional staff to accomplish – e.g. links to other articles, expanded topics, additional details for an article, etc. The trade-off is whether this would help with membership growth – not clear.

What is needed?

Glider reports: These are generally of interest to readers. Would be hard to energize anyone to take up Dick Johnson's approach, but simple pilot reports for different models would be of great interest, I think.

ADS-B articles: Tremendous confusion in this area for glider pilots. FAA emphasizes power planes and needs, not gliders. SSA needs to help cut through the confusion, and ensure FAA understands those characteristics of soaring *vis a vis* general and commercial aviation.

Accident Reports: In the past, there have been accident reports for the purpose of educating pilots about the risky side of soaring and risk management. There are individuals who have taken this on in the past. It is a tricky subject. I've had two articles withdrawn by authors after submitting reports on their personal experiences. One was withdrawn due to peer pressure (it was not perceived as reflecting well on the glider operation), and one because the author had talked about it so much to a number of clubs that he felt it had wide enough distribution, and he didn't really want to read about it in the magazine. So personal accounts are tricky. This doesn't mean there can't be articles examining accident causes. I'd appreciate feedback on this.

Junior articles

I really mean more articles by the junior members of SSA. These have been increasing, but more is better. Junior contests, or simply articles by the more junior members can have a profound effect on younger members or would-be members. We carry articles on historical events and members; we also need articles about and from those who will one day be part of soaring's history.

Conclusion

The magazine is in good shape with regard to getting articles and photos of interest to membership overall. The content and appearance is pretty good. The topic list has been expanding, thereby reaching a broader spectrum of interests.

Finally, the better the articles and photos we get, the more of a challenge it is to members to provide articles and photos that are even better. We must remember that *Soaring* is a members' magazine, fully reliant on members to provide materials to be published. I often remind people who criticize any content (or lack thereof) that they are free to provide better input.