

AN AIRLINE PILOT LOOKS AT SOARING

As told to R. Avery Hall by Captain J. Shelly Charles

According to an old saying, when a dog bites a man it's not news. Nor do we get excited when a man buys a sailplane and begins to take up soaring as a hobby. However, if that man happens to be a veteran airline pilot with nearly two million miles of flying to his credit, here indeed is something extraordinary!

And that's exactly the story of Captain J. S. Charles, senior pilot on Eastern Air Lines' Atlanta-Chicago run, who recently joined the ever growing ranks of soaring enthusiasts with the construction of a Bowlus Baby Albatross sailplane.

Captain Charles, or "Shelly" as he is known to his friends, is not exactly what one would call a "novice" to the flying game. His air activities started some nineteen years ago, immediately after the war, and have included everything from racing and stunt flying in tiny aerobatic ships, to his present job of guiding a twelve ton sky liner on its regular scheduled runs!

Now when the sport of soaring has sufficient appeal to cause an airline pilot to take a "postman's holiday" on his day off, how much more thrilling it becomes to those of us who fly only occasionally! Here is simple, emphatic proof that soaring is unique; providing a thrill that no other sport can offer. But let's let Shelly speak for himself:

"Previous to my flights in 'La Paloma' last summer, the extent of my gliding experience was a few airport hops in an old primary, some ten years ago. However, the memory of this, plus a small amount of information gleaned from a few magazine articles, convinced me that here was the sport supreme. Nor was I disappointed when, after nearly six months of work during my spare time, the new ship was test-hopped last May.

"At first, of course, I had a tendency to fly it too fast, and was afraid to wrap it up in a tight spiral, but within a month I was making aero towed flights and remaining aloft for over an hour at a time. And with the confidence thus gained, came the first real thrill of thermal soaring. In this connection, I cannot recommend the advantages of aero towed starts too highly. Although it is quite possible to contact a thermal from automobile or winch tow, the airplane method has the power to release the sailplane in a definite, favorable location where the continuance of the flight is almost assured.

"From these first experiences with thermals then, dates my present love for soaring. Nowhere else is there the exhilarating sensation of sweeping, silent flight; for so long the exclusive prerogative of the birds. Without question, there is no comparable phase of powered flying, so let him reconsider who has flown every type of airplane; the sailplane, so often looked upon with scorn by pilots, can *still* give him a thrill!

"But this is not all. No better method of exploring the turbulence in the atmosphere, the internal structure of clouds, has yet been devised. Due largely to the results of sailplane flights, the whole theory of the formation of thermals has been revised within the past five years. New



Captain J. Shelly Charles

and important information is being brought to light every year by meteorologists and sailplane pilots who now work in close cooperation. To be a successful soaring pilot, one must also know something of meteorology; too often we find an airplane pilot without this all-important knowledge.

"Admittedly, my profession gives me some advantage over those sailplane owners who do not fly otherwise, and to this may probably be ascribed what measure of success was mine during the past fall and summer. Perhaps the most important item has been the use of the Eastern Air Lines weather map posted every six hours in their operations office at the Atlanta airport. Through its use I have been enabled to pick the most favorable days for my flights. If the weather reports indicate unfavorable conditions I don't even try it. Also, years of instrument flying made much easier my first attempts at cloud flying last August. Except for the adjustment required to make the turn indicator suitable for the sailplane, there was practically no difference in the technique required.

"And yet I have learned a lot. There is no better antidote for fear of a forced landing than a few flights in a glider. There is a saying that for every glider flight, there is one forced landing. Although I have landed 'La Paloma' several times through the sheer necessity of returning home before a certain hour, it is undoubtedly true that such flights do give a pilot confidence in his ability to land with the engine dead. Judgment of gliding angle, effects of wind, and spot landing ability are all improved and kept alert in the art of motorless flight. After all, in landing a sailplane you don't drag the field once, gun it, and go around again. The approach has got to be right the first time!

"For the fellow with a sense of humor, funny situations often occur. Not long after the completion of the ship a
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