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Vol. 105 No. 49 12 Pages

The XIT City

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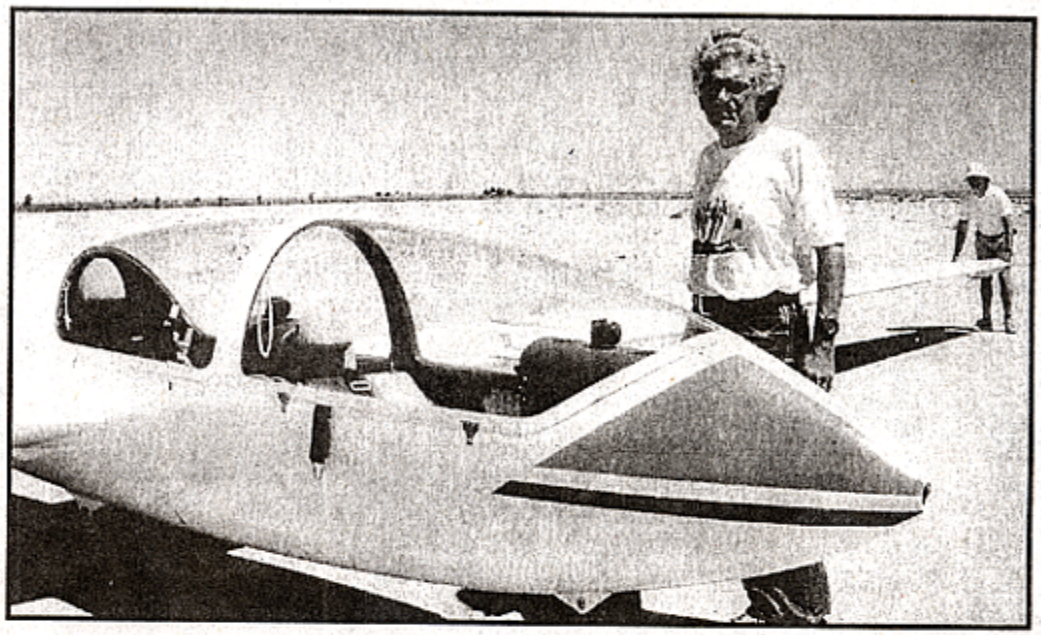
50 Cent

Lakeside
Secret Garden
Last Stop
Page 3

The Sailplanes
are Coming!
Details
Page 4

XIT Rodeo &
Reunion Event
Schedule
Page 12

Colorado Glider Pilots to Soar from Dalhart's Miller Field



Texan Photo by Aaron Graves

Sam Streger stands beside his glider. Sam and fellow club members from the Soaring Society of Boulder, Colorado, will convene at Dalhart's Miller airfield starting July 10th.

DALHART, TEXAS - MILLER FIELD - July 10-17, 2004 - Members of the Colorado's Soaring Society of Boulder will be visiting Dalhart to sample the strong Texas thermal updrafts starting on Saturday, July 10.

"Our club normally soars in the mountains of Colorado but we have been coming to Dalhart for years and we always enjoy it", said camp organizer Dick Hogue.

The Dalhart area has almost perfect conditions for flying sailplanes with its normally hot dry summer weather and strong updrafts.

Gliders, or Sailplanes as they are sometimes called, do not have an engine but stay aloft using columns of rising air, or thermals, normally associated with the Dalhart area. Thermals can rise to over 13,000 feet around Dalhart and are often marked by puffy cumulous clouds.

Sailplane pilots bank their craft in tight circles to climb in thermals often achieving climb rates of 500 to 1000 feet per minute. Flights of over three hours are common.

Sailplanes are towed aloft behind a powered aircraft to around 2,000 feet above the ground before releasing the tow rope. Without a motor gliders must quickly find a thermal to climb on or they will be back on the ground in 20-30 minutes.

Fortunately thermals are common around Dalhart so staying aloft is not normally a problem. Skilled pilots can fly hundreds of miles gliding from thermal to thermal in cross country flight.

Because of Dalhart's location, local soaring pilots can accomplish the coveted five state flight which includes rounding turnpoints in Texas, Okalahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico if the weather is favorable.

Modern sailplanes are made out of very strong composite materials similar to the kinds found on airlines and jet fighters. A single place glider weights approximately 550 lbs and has a speed range of between 45 and 170 mph.

Because sailplanes do not carry a motor they are designed to minimize aerodynamic drag giving them a sleek smooth look. Very high performance sailplanes can go 60 feet forward to one foot down and cover 60 miles in one glide without lift from only 5,000 feet.

Soaring pilots use sensitive instruments including global positioning systems (GPS) to efficiently climb in thermals and navigate around the days course. The GPS data is recorded and can be replayed on a computer after the flight.

The Dalhart Camp starts on July 10 and concludes on July 17 with 15-25 club members attending the week long event.

The sport of soaring is available nationally through the over 180 active soaring clubs around the nation. Contact the Soaring Society of America on the web (www.ssa.org) or call (505 392-1177) for your local soaring operation.

Hitch a Ride with the Soaring Society of Boulder

By Aaron Graves

Sam Steger, member of the Soaring Society of Boulder, CO., is inviting you to come and experience the art and science of flying a glider. The soaring club is at the Miller Airfield until July 17.

Sam said he will offer rides to those interested. Rides costs anywhere from $50 to $70, depending on what it costs him to get the plane off the ground.

The idea of flying a sailplane can easily fire the imagination. Effortlessly soaring through the sky in silent flight makes the sport a compelling endeavor.

Helmut Reichmann, three time World Soaring Champion, put it best: "Nature opens up to the soaring pilot a world ... of might forces, gentle or wild, majestic and mysterious. The pilot enters this realm, flies in it, makes use of its dynamics, and tries to explore and fathom its mysteries. The burden of everyday life is left on the ground."

It's flying in its purest and most beautiful expression. Pilots routinely climb to high altitudes, soar hundreds of miles, and stay up for hours using only knowledge, skill and intuition.

Approximately 180 active soaring clubs exist in America, providing 38,000 licensed glider pilots a relaxing way to enjoy the sport. Competitions are also held throughout the year.

The Soaring Society of Boulder comes to Dalhart every year to take advantage of the strong Texas thermal updrafts. Sailplanes use three main forms of lift, one of which is thermal. The earth, when heated, sends up columns of warm rising air which are large enough for sailplanes to circle in and climb. Thermals can reach 3,000 to 5,000 feet above the ground and are often topped by a puffy cumulus cloud.

Using thermal lift, gliders can travel 100-300 miles with average speeds of 50 to 90 miles per hour. On good days, a thermal can lift a plane 1,000 feet a minute.

Thermal lift is the most common form. Gliders also take advantage of two types of lift that occur in the mountains. Ridge lift, created from wind blowing up the side of a mountain, can allow gliders to fly up to 130 miles per hour and cover 1,000 miles in one trip. Wave lift, created by winds blowing over a mountain top, can boost a plane up to 40,000 feet.

Gliders are usually pulled aloft by a powered plane, called a two plane. Typical areo-tows pull planes up to two to three thousand feet before the glider pilot detaches the tow rope.

The Soaring Society of America, established in 1932, has developed a series of internationally recognized awards for various achievements in soaring. Famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh and wife Anne earned C badges #9 and #10.

The coveted Diamond badge requires a flight of over 316 miles and a height gain of over 16,500 feet. Less than 1,000 Diamond badges have awarded in the United States.

Because of Dalhart's location, local soaring pilots can accomplish the coveted five state flight which includes rounding turnpoints in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico if the weather is favorable.

The US Distance Record was 263 miles, flown by Woody Brown in June of 1939. Brown flew from Wichita Falls, Texas to Wichita, Kansas. The US Altitude Record in a single person sailplane was set in July of 1939. Bob Stanley reached 17,265 feet.

The image of soaring as an extreme sport is not correct, according to the Soaring Society of America. Their media guide points out that the Federal Aviation Administration will allow 14 year olds to fly solo. Gliders are engineered for strength and safety. Even landings are virtually incident free due to the plane's slow approach speeds.

Sailplanes come in all shapes and sizes – and costs. Basic training planes and highly sophisticated competitive models are available. Modern sailplanes are made out of very strong composite materials similar to the kinds found on airlines and jet fighters.

A single place glider weights approximately 550 lbs and has a speed range of between 45 and 170 mph. The planes are usually towed in long, slider trailers, with the wings and tail fin being detached.

The Dalhart Camp started on July 10 and will conclude on July 17. Look for about 15-25 planes at the Miller airport.

The Soaring Society of Boulder currently has 130 pilots on membership. Dalhart is only one stop for the club. They also fly in Salida, Colorado, Moriarty, New Mexico and other locations.

If you enjoy your ride and think soaring is for you, talk to the Soaring Society of Boulder about joining – or forming – a soaring club.

You can also find more information on the web at www.ssa.org, or call the Soaring Society of America at 505-392-1177.

Picture, page 1 from ssa.org