

Wolfgang Späte om Rhöntävlingen 1938

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" It is right that I was the first, already in 1937, to give some thought to optimum speeds to fly between thermals for sailplanes doing cross countries. During my first Semester at the Darmstadt Technical Highschool, encouraged by Professor Scheubel, I gave some scientific thought to the problem. The 1938 Rhön Contest finally gave me occasion to try out my theory in practice. Swiss glider pilots later gave me the honour of being the first foreigner to use the theory, but Paul McCready refined it, predicting the improved sailplane performances of the postwar era. It is vital for the cross country flying of today's fibreglass sailplanes and McCready has received much credit for this. .

Perhaps it is of interest for me to describe to you my first experiences using the theory and how my situation was at that time.

I had officially entered the 1938 Rhön Contest with a REIHER 2, but I had to settle for the previous year's REIHER 1. This had had 90 kgs (198 lbs) added to its weight to strengthen its main spars. Thus, due to its increased weight, its polar curve had slipped considerably to the right. In other words, its minimum speed was somewhere between 75-80 kph. When lift was discovered of over 2 metres/sec, the bird would really move when getting to the next lift. All other gliders in the contest fell behind. I was able to win the 19th Rhön Contest, although on the first two days, I was unable to stay up due to feeble lift.

From the 3rd Contest day, the temperature gradient, especially at altitude, became more and more stable and regularly during the afternoons, fine cumulo nimbi started to build. Under these, I was able to turn my heavy ship in large diameter circles, centred in lift of between 3 to 4 metres per sec. As there was no controlled airspace at that time, one was able to climb blind in cloud.

I decided to take my machine in to cloud in 5-6 m/sec lift and stayed with it until I felt I had begun to lose its centre I then straightened out on course and, as soon as I had left the cloud, I would steer towards the next cumulus at 150 kph. Reaching the highest cumulus, I would enter it at its side. By doing this, I could more simply discover the best area of lift. I have to say that I had been practising this earlier in the year while research flying for DFS.

Two of the other competitors, (Bräutigam and Kraft) by chance observed me carrying on like this and asked, shaking their heads, if I had gone crazy to throw away my height like this...150 kph at that time was usual for glider pilots who wished to start loops... not for pilots doing cross countries. How things have changed since then!

Of course, during the contest, I did not let my secret out. Only when I was in the air after a bungee launch, did I take out the small table from a pocket in my flying suit, to stick it firmly somewhere on the instrument panel. After a landing, I would hide the card again. Only when I was securely in first place in the contest's points, did I let my secret be known. But no one wished to believe me. Seff Kunz, I remember him still now...smiled sympathetically and said finally, when I had some quiet..."You can write out a report on it ". That, I did, and I put it together with an application for the Günther Grönhoff Memorial Prize, which was awarded each year for a cross country flight which had special scientific meaning. (I had, during the

contest, made a goal flight of over 320 kms from the Wasserkuppe to Freiburg im Breisgau and I thought that this would give me a chance of winning it).

In 1934, Peter Riedel had won it. In 1935, I won it for the first time (for distance flying and a thesis on cloud streets) In 1936 and 1937, it was not awarded. Should I win it for the second time, I would have to advertise it loudly. The Cup was of heavy silver and contained two bottles of Sekt, This would have allowed the occasion to be adequately celebrated with my team.

My submission did not succeed. The cup was not awarded and it remained in the Grossruckerswald Gliding School. At last, after 34 years, I have been recognised for having been the first to have produced a Best-Speed-to fly table given the strength of the lift. One must only manage to live long enough to receive proper recognition. Many thanks, dear Max Haubenhofer! So long as he is around, something serious will come out of the joy of gliding."