

WSPA- The Women Soaring Pilot Association
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In 2009 for the first time in WSPA's history will the seminar take place in Europe, in Lesce/Bled, Slovenia. The date for that seminar is July 18, 2009 – July 22, 2009. Preparations for that seminar are already under way and an update will be posted on WSPA's web page www.womensoaring.org

Soaring in the United States began after the news of motor-less flights at the Wasserkuppe in Germany reached this country. Amongst the early glider pilots in the US were five women, one of them Anne Lindbergh, wife of Charles Lindbergh. These five created so much enthusiasm that in 1929 a women's glider club, the Anne Lindbergh Club formed. In the 1930s women started to participate in contests. In the 1950s, at a time when the whole US had only 1,000 registered glider pilots women's participation in the sport reached its highest percentage and performance level. Since then women's participation in the sport has percentage-wise declined. From the early to mid 1970s American women pilots participated in the international women contests in Europe. The last participant was Karol Hines who flew as a guest in the then-renamed European Women Championships in Orel, Russia. Karol financed her participation mainly by herself with a small support from WSPA. It wasn't until 1999 that an American woman again participated in an international contest: Liz Schwenkler flew for the US on the Junior Team in Holland. 8 years later, in 2007, Kathy Fosha earned a berth on the Junior Team to fly in Rieti, Italy.

At soaring gatherings the question always pops up why no American women participate in World Championships. One reason is that percentage-wise there are very few women glider pilots in the US and these few are spread over a very big country. Some of the States don't even have glider clubs. Amongst these relatively few only a very small number ever fly in any contest, be it on regional or national level. Geography plays a roll. The distance between East and West Coast is about 5,000 km so that the few women very seldom get a chance to meet, since the biggest concentration of clubs can be found along the two coasts. In addition the surprise observation was made that since the women's liberation movement started, the number of women in soaring declined. The reason is probably that many joined the work force and since vacation time in the US is much less than in European countries they did not want to invest the time into competition soaring. (Note the age of our men's team. Most members are already retired or in some cases self-employed and therefore more flexible in the use of time).

To start more interaction amongst the women glider pilots, Bertha Ryan, a glider pilot herself and later the recipient of the Majewska Medal, distributed amongst the clubs a survey to find out how many women glider pilots were in the US. Fifty-seven women responded. Encouraged by the response, Bertha started a small newsletter that later evolved into the bi-monthly *Hangar Soaring*, which became a sounding board for new ideas and communication amongst the women.

Bertha's initiative led in 1978 to the first week-long women seminar. It was then decided to hold this seminar annually and each time in a different part of the US, to enable as many women as possible to attend over the years. Out of these seminars grew the idea of forming a Women Soaring Association, which happened in 1986 and whose mission it was to encourage and support the women glider pilots.

Private donations and grants made it possible to establish scholarships to support young pilots (and recently not so young pilots) and help to defray the costs of the seminars. Through the years the organization has grown to over 200 members (women and men) and since the early 2000s men and women from seven overseas countries have joined the organization. Several came across the Atlantic for the seminars especially then when the seminar was held in the Western States.

We hope that many of the European women glider pilots will participate in this seminar and that new friendships will be forged on both sides of the Atlantic.