

## THE FIRST COLUMN

Our fascination with tailless aircraft of various kinds goes back several years and owes its beginnings to our acquiring plans for Dave Jones' "Raven" from Model Builder and seeing a photo of Curt Weller's "Elfe 2" in Model Aviation at about the same time. Since then we have built and flown 12 sailplanes, of which 10 have been tailless. In fact, we decided some time ago to build no more tailed sailplanes for ourselves. Our dedication to this ideal caused Bob Dodgson some consternation a couple of years back, when we won a "Windsong" kit at a contest. His fears increased noticeably when we confided to him we felt an inverted Eppler 214 to be an acceptable airfoil for a "plank" design.

We must confess to all (1) we are now building the "Windsong" kit, (2) it will have a tail, and (3) it belongs to our son. However, we do have two 'wings currently under construction: a 1/4 scale Marske Pioneer II-D (which will be flying at the Richland Fun Fly in May), and a large swept 'wing for unlimited class competition. Plus, there are construction plans for at least two more tailless designs either already drawn up or rolling around inside our heads.

We are genuinely excited to see a surging interest in flying wings and tailless designs, and believe this is probably due to an increase in slope soaring activity. The explanation for this correlation has to do with the characteristics of nearly all of the currently available tailless designs, be they kits, magazine offerings, or scratch-built creations. Tailless soarers are in general conveniently compact, they tend to fly faster than conventional designs of the same wing loading, and they usually show good aerobatic capability. Since their relatively high sink rate is not the disadvantage on the slope that it is in thermal flying, these 'wings, with all of their positive qualities, are a dream come true for the dedicated slope soarer.

More and more thermal flyers are being attracted to tailless sailplanes as new designs demonstrate lower sink rates, and it appears further increases in performance are probably not very difficult to obtain. The fact is, there are certain AMA events in which tailless designs are specifically excluded due to the overwhelming advantage they've demonstrated in the past. We believe flying wings can be competitive in both thermal duration and F3B contests.

At the flying field, we and our 'wings have always been met with numerous questions, and the fact many people are naturally curious about tailless aircraft has been readily apparent to us from the start. There is a hesitancy on the part of most modelers, however, when it comes to actually building a tailless design, and we think this is due to insufficient available information. What we would like to do is share some of the information which we have been (and still are) accumulating, perhaps alleviating some of the perceived information gap, and maybe giving some readers the courage to build and fly a tailless sailplane. We would welcome the opportunity to write about the new airfoils specially designed for tailless aircraft, construction techniques which can better assure rigid structures, methods of improving performance, some thoughts we have about a flying wing perhaps being the best Cross Country (XC) machine as well as the best RC-Hand Launched Glider (RC-HLG), and other assorted topics.

As you can probably tell, we have strong feelings about the importance of sharing information; equally important in our minds is saying where the information was found. Revealing an information source has several beneficial effects: (1) it gives credit where credit is due, (2) it lends credibility to the statements offered, and (3) it gives the interested reader an opportunity to explore a little further.

We are eager for feedback on the ideas presented here, and always appreciate comments, questions and information about flying wings and tailless aircraft of any type.