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Icarus in the Swiss Sky

The engineer Francis Rogallo, «Father» of the Delta glider, retired to Kitty Hawk in North Carolina in 1972, the same place where the Whright Brothers achieved their first flying feats.

Since the days of Daedalus and Icarus, the flying man has remained man's unfulfilled dream, the unsatisfied hope. There has been no lack of experiments and research: from Leonardo da Vinci to Otto Lilienthal – how many human beings have tried to conquer the sky which remained a mystery?

One had to wait till 1949 until one was able to open up the era of the bird-man. The first licence acquired by Francis Rogallo marked the beginning of a new adventure. America was amazed when, on 4th July 1969, Bill Bennet flew over the Statue of Liberty in New York. And now this new sport is conquering the world.

In Switzerland, it was the Valaisan Etienne Rithner who, above all, made known hang-gliding (Delta gliding). After many trials he constructed his own appliance, in-

fecting many pupils with his enthusiasm, won the first European Cup and founded a school at Les Diablerets. The passion for this sport is extraordinary. The television service of Western Switzerland made a film with experts who float into the air from nearly 3000 m in the Diablerets Massif. Delta gliding is really something of a paradox: It is the result of research covering centuries; it has become a reality in an era of highly developed technology, and yet it is so simple: four metal tubes, 20 square metres of sail, cables, straps, a trapeze – that is all. The man changes direction and angle of the flight by shifting the weight of his body. And now he has become master of the earth and of the skies.

Inspite of the elegance and agility of modern Icarus one should not be deceived by the simplicity of hang-gliding, for the apprenticeship is long and difficult, and it is a long way from the first efforts of gliding down to the phantastic development demonstrated by ex-



perts. Courage alone is not sufficient, and you get nowhere with daredevilry. Much patience, unflagging perseverance, ever improving technical skill and advanced knowledge are indispensable requirements for success. The outlines of the terrain, climate and winds must be as familiar as the hang-glider.¹

The Federal Aviation Office and the Swiss Hang-Gliding Association have closely followed the fast increase of flying men. At the moment, the two bodies work with a common and imperative aim: safety. The certificate of glide-worthiness is given only to apparatus complying with all requirements, and gliding licences are issued only after stringent selection. The initial difficulties have been overcome, and on this basis, the Delta gliding sport will be able to develop and attract new disciples.

Priority is given to security, and then, only then, the ecstasy of the wide open spaces can be given free rein and men will compete with birds in their own element.



¹ «Hang-Glider»: official name of the Delta Glider.