

HARLAND C. ROSS (1959) (1906-1977)

Harland Ross was known by his art – that of the designer, builder, pilot. By his combination of vision, energy, action, and with a delightful personality, he contributed as much as any other pioneer to the soaring movement between 1928 and 1977. He had one of the more creative minds of the era.

Harland C. Ross was associated with Hawley Bowlus as a designer and builder at San Diego in the early years and was among the first fifteen Americans ever to soar. By 1930 he combined weather analysis with soaring attempts and took his sailplane to 6,000 feet above Mt. Volcan, CA as a result of intercepting predicted weather. This was a record in its day and established a pattern.



In 1938 Harland and others organized the “SSA Flatland Soaring Expedition” at Wichita Falls, TX where flights exceeding 200 miles were made from auto launches. At Bishop, CA he became preeminent, along with Bob Symons, in the discovery and exploration of the Sierra Wave phenomena and set altitude records in the late 1940s. The “Marfa Dewline Front” was his next contribution to soaring meteorology. He utilized it to soar 365 miles in a no-wind condition, averaging 66 mph plus in his own R-6 design.



His innovative sailplane designs were a major factor in the high standing of American soaring during that time period. His sailplanes were the first to achieve 20:1, 30:1 and 40:1 L/D ratios in the United States. He was a consultant in the development of the Mescalero and Zuni sailplanes. Among the best known of his “R” series is the RS-1 Zanonias flow by Harland and Harvey Stephens at Elmira, NY in 1937. With John Robinson at the controls, the Zanonias went

on to win many contests and to achieve record distances and altitudes. With the RJ-5 Dick Johnson broke the 500-mile “barrier”. Harland's R-6 soared to a number of out-and-return and triangle records both single and multi-place.



*Ross-Johnson RJ-5 at Mississippi State in the 1950s
The most famous of the Ross designs*

These achievements are only a part of his story. Wherever he went, he was most effective in promoting soaring. In addition to being a director of the SSA, he was the first president of the Southern California Soaring Association in 1936.

He worked for many years in the engineering department of Beech Aircraft but, in his eventful life, he supported himself and his family as an instructor, charter pilot and craftsman.

Harland Ross was awarded the Eaton Trophy (with R.F. Symons) in 1949 and the Tuntland Award in 1960. He earned the Barringer Trophy in 1959, Silver Badge #9 in 1937 (Intl #510), Gold #16 in 1947 and Diamond #14 (Intl #116) in 1958. He holds the Symons Two-Lennie Pin #16.

The above was adapted from an article by Vic Saudek.
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