Flight fans, experts meet at conference

By Gerald Radack

The second annual International Symposium on Technology and Science of Low-Speed and Motored Flight was held in Kennebunkport last week, drawing fliers from all sorts of areas, "Flight fans" gathered to discuss paper and new ideas in the fields of soaring, hang gliding, and man-powered flight. Participants included amateur and professional sailplane pilots, airplane design experts, and scientists studying the fundamentals of low-speed flight and soaring.

An exhibition of sailplanes and hang-gliders was held on Kennebunk Plaza and in Rockwell Cage, where the MIT community had an opportunity to learn about the sports.

The conference, sponsored by the MIT Soaring Association, the Soaring Association of America, and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, was "a great success," according to Sam A. Francis, a '67, member of the MIT club and New England director of the Soaring Association of America.

"Getting this class of people together to discuss problems produces insight in all sorts of areas," Francis said. He pointed to papers being delivered on flying strategies for sailplanes, low-speed aerodynamics, sailplane testing, man-powered aircraft, and design techniques as examples of areas that would benefit directly from the meeting.

The craft on exhibit during the conference included sailplanes - small planes with larger-than-normal wingspans, which are towed into the air behind a conventional airplane and released to fly as far as possible - and hang-gliders, which resemble large kites. A flier of a hang-gliders jumps off cliffs, hills, or sand dunes, and flies suspended from the bottom of the glider.

No man-powered aircraft were present at the exhibition although a group of MIT researchers have been working for more than a year on developing a biplane, two-person man-powered airplane - the Biplane Ultralight Research Device.

Francis said that the conference, the second of its kind, had been started by the MIT club and the Soaring Association last year, with support from the MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics. The addition of the American Institute as a sponsor gives the conference "added prestige," Francis said.

The conference sponsors plan to hold the conference every year, alternating between MIT and other institutions. MIT hopes the conference will be vital.

Francis said he learned how to "deploy knowledge and resources."