Soaring is not a free ride
(Continued from page 1)

Soaring in the US is still very much a sport for the elite. There is nothing practical about it; one goes up and one must come down in the same place — or else have a large ground support crew. And yet, the experience of flight is very intense and direct. There is nothing but the glider between the pilot and the ground. Those laws of physics, aerodynamics, lift and drag — they really work.

The only damage suffered in that first glider flight was psychological. I am now in a Blanki, a high performance two-seat glider. Although we are flying faster than we were in the Schweizer 2-33, the wind seems quieter. Roy Bourgeois, one of the FAA certified instructors, tells me, "Take your hands off the controls."

I obey. "Turn around," he continued — his hands raised in the air. "You're not flying the glider, and I'm not flying it, so stop it!"

A glider is naturally unstable. The pilot's job is to notice the environment, search for thermals, and navigate the craft. He must always be aware of what is happening to and around the glider — unlike the passive experience of being carried from Washington to Boston on a Boeing 727. It is an absorbing experience; abseiling the scenery, finding a thermal or current, circling till you stay in that thermal. One's mind is totally concentrated on flying.

Bourgeois makes the landing approach, then he brings the Blanki in. I find it hard to believe that we are on the ground; the landing is so smooth.

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