

One Swell Swoop

A Fine Week of Soaring

directed by Juan Mandalbaum.
Geovision, 2004. DVD, 69 min., \$34.90.

Don't let the bland title fool you. A *Fine Week of Soaring* is a must-see for every power pilot who has wondered what experienced soaring pilots do when they cut loose and disappear for the day.

Filmed at Mifflin, Pennsylvania, during a regional soaring contest, the video includes beautiful aerial photography over the ridges of the Allegheny mountains. Producer-director-writer Juan Mandalbaum, an accomplished soaring pilot and professional moviemaker, shoots from the back seat of his Duo Discus sailplane with a master at the controls: 15-time U.S. national champion Karl Striedieck. Striedieck discovered in the late 1960s the advantages of flying over Appalachian ridges, where he stunned the soaring world by using a modest glider to set world distance records.

Unlike previous soaring films, this one puts you in the cockpit and keeps you there. Contrary to the common impression that soaring is a serene way to fly, the movie's portrayal of sailplane racing proves it is an intense and technically challenging sport. Perhaps no other aviation sport requires this combination of continual decision-making, precision flying, and knowledge of micro-meteorology and terrain.



JOHN GOOD

Karl Striedieck soars by a Pennsylvania ridgetop landing strip in a Duo Discus.

Ridge soaring at sites such as Mifflin also requires extensive knowledge of the local geography to ensure safety as well as speed. George Moffat, the dean of American competition soaring, comments: "Soaring is finding your way through the invisible geography of the sky," but shots of the topography overflow and the inflight commentary illustrate how daunting the sport can be when the pilot is soaring 50 feet above the trees at 100 knots.

The wide-angle camera placed on the tail of the Duo Discus gives an excellent view of what Striedieck sees, a camera behind his shoulder allows you to see the cockpit action, and audio of the interaction between Striedieck and Mandalbaum supplies context, meanings, and instruction.

GPS recording units tailored to sailplane use are now mandatory in competition. As a result, 3D terrain mapping can be combined with each flight's track data (and that of nearby competitors). Mandalbaum uses the technology to create digital animations, which turn the film into a gripping video game and give viewers a much improved feel for what goes on during a race.

Excellent production values, storyline, editing, and an unobtrusive musical score make this video part essay, part documentary, part instruction, and all

soaring enjoyment—one of the best films on soaring I have seen, and one that will appeal to pilots of all stripes.

—Tony Burton is the editor of free flight, the *Soaring Association of Canada's* magazine.