

The Speight Papers – Book Review

Soaring Australian Thermals is a collection of the voluminous work of Garry Speight, amassed over half a century. When a pilot of 63 years experience speaks, with 54 of those years on gliders, I'm quick to listen. When the conversation is derived from an objective, analytical look at the science of our sport, I surrender my full attention.

Over 50 years, Garry has applied the scientific method to understanding gliding and in turn, improving his own practice of it. Generously shared with the gliding community through publications at home and abroad, his writing style is targeted at furthering understanding among the general gliding population. A Reichmanesque, arithmetic-laden publication it is not.

The first of my own step changes in cross country soaring performance came under Garry's tutelage. Tasked with conducting my site check and local area familiarisation at Lake Keepit, Garry introduced the concept of Critical Rate of Climb, as explained in the article 'Best Use of Thermals'. How MacCready settings could be varied with altitude to introduce a form of risk management to outlandings resonated strongly with me. Having not long graduated from glider pilot to soaring pilot, this helped overcome my hesitation at a new site where I had reverted from pushing for speed & distance to the relative security of endurance mode.

Being iconoclastic however, does not come without controversy. Challenging long held practices and beliefs is bound to be met with robust debate and it's a credit to both author and editor that criticisms in response to these articles have been published as well. Letters to the editor in rebuttal to some of the assertions within provide balance and allow the reader come to their own conclusions.

The reproduction of nomograms used to support Garry's assertions have retained their original form. Earlier examples, drawn freehand, remind of a time when exploded parts diagrams in technical manuals were expertly hand drawn and technical drawing was a core school subject. As the book progresses, these give way to typeset graphs and in turn, to the computer-derived figures of present day. Similarly, vintage glider types give way to fibreglass and foil barographs to electronic barograms; all quiet emphasis of the 50 years that these articles span.

Looking beyond the technical content, this publication provides the reader with snapshots of gliding history over the period. Whether it be Garry's personal development in the sport, the progression of glider types and their respective improvements in performance, or the evolution of Australian gliding as a whole.

This book is well suited to the printed form. Not just for the ease of reference to overleaf figures while studying the text, but for the quality of full colour pictures used to compliment the work. Lake Keepit's twitchers, or 'ornithographers of the fixed wing kind', have provided stunning photos for use in this book.

I would recommend *Soaring Australian Thermals* to any glider pilot, from early cross country and far beyond. Due to the varying complexity of concepts discussed, a great deal of benefit is to be gained from re-reading as a pilots soaring skills and experience develop. Just as Garry's have.