

ALLEN L. LEFFLER (2001)
(~1930 - 2019)

Al Leffler, better known as “Little Boy” on the competition circuit, is most famous for his successes as a contest pilot but also has served our sport with numerous behind-the-scenes contributions. He started soaring at El Mirage in 1957 and had his first taste of competition flying the first Reno Air Races in 1964 (gliders raced at Carson City). Over his long competition career, he has flown in 46 Nationals, the first one at Stead in 1966 and others at Albert Lea, Barstow, Bryan, Caddo Mills, Chester, Elmira, El Mirage (Champion in 1976), Ephrata, Hobbs, Littlefield, Livingston, Marana (Champion in 1983), Marfa, Minden and Sunflower. He was in the top ten at least twenty times (fourteen in the top five).



He has also flown several prestigious competitions by invitation – Ameriglide (1990), Hitachi Masters of Soaring (1986, 1987, 1988) and the Smirnoff Derby (1977). He was the first American invited to compete for the Gemena Cup in Hungary and he won (1988).

Al has also flown at least 35 Regional Competitions from 1965 to 2001 and won at least 12, placing near the top in most others. He flew the Torrey Pines Meet in 1961.

His first sailplane was a Laister-Kaufman which he modified, named the LM-1 and flew in his first Nationals (Stead 1966). Later he purchased an Australian Boomerang ES-60 which he flew in Nationals at Elmira and twice at Marfa. His next sailplane was a Cirrus which he flew in Nationals at El Mirage and Bryan and also loaned to Australian John Rowe to fly in the World Open Class at Marfa in 1970. Next he owned several models of the Nimbus – 2, 3, 3DT and 4. He also flew “kiddie gliders” (his term) in other than Open Class – Mosquito, AS-W 20, ASW-19, Ventus, Discus.

Al Leffler saw his first glider when he was in the Air Force stationed at Scott Field, IL. He had gone with a friend to see something described as “this thing sitting in the back in the corner of a dingy barn.” Al didn't know what kind of a glider it was but the fellow wanted \$300 for it. His reaction? “My Aeronca Chief only cost \$450 and that had an engine in it!” Or perhaps he did not have the \$300. At last, about eight years later in 1957, after moving to California, marriage and a family, he decided to go to El Mirage for a glider ride, and managed to get a flight in a club Pratt-Read. He was hooked.

In 1959 he helped organize the Orange County Soaring Club, added several sailplane ratings to his Commercial airplane license and spent a few years instructing for the club. He joined with others in the 1960s and '70s to organize the Southern California Competition Club for the purpose of exploring various useful techniques for sailplane contests including the use of cameras for turn point control and the optical start gate as used today.



In 1972 he took his *Cirrus* to Alaska. One of his goals was to fly up to Mt. McKinley. Unfortunately he couldn't get anyplace because there was no opening in the clouds and he couldn't find a wave to get up to the top.

In 1984 he helped Tom Stowers start High Country Soaring at Minden and has participated in sponsoring many events. In 1999 he was the Competition Director for the Standard Class Nationals at Minden.

One of the things that impresses everyone was that Al Leffler always came to soaring events with his wife, Irene, and their children. As he says, "I really had the bug I guess. I spent the rest of my life chasing dust devils and my wife chasing me."

One time he answered an SSA questionnaire wanting to know if he had any off-field landing experiences. He smiled and said that "for about the first 20 years, that's about all we had. . . We didn't know you were supposed to come back."

Al Leffler earned the du Pont Trophy in 1976 and 1983, the Stroukoff Trophy in 1983, Silver badge #463 in 1961, Gold #128 in 1962, Diamond #54 (Int #480) in 1966 and the Symons One Lennie #111.

