

**PAUL F. BIKLE (1960)**  
**(1916-1991)**

There are some members of the Soaring Hall of Fame that have made so many contributions to our sport and have so many accomplishments that we almost do them a disservice by trying to describe them on one sheet of paper. But we will try. Please search both *Soaring* magazine and the Internet for further information.

Aviation was his business; soaring his sport. He touched the lives of many people and made an indelible mark on the course of flight in the Twentieth Century.

We could list all his accomplishments but they do not tell the whole story about him – his driving determination to win – whether in soaring, in his profession or in a card game with friends or co-workers.



Paul Bikle was born June 5, 1916 in Wilkensburg, Pennsylvania. He attended the University of Detroit in 1934 and joined the college glider club where the students taught themselves to fly. In three years he had 218 tows and two hours and twenty minutes of flying from tows behind a 1929 Buick using a 300 foot tow rope. Soaring took a back seat for a while until in 1947 he and others formed the Soaring Society of Dayton. Thirteen years after his first glider flight, he earned his “C” badge with a seven minute flight in the club's TG-3.

He moved to California in 1951 and purchased his first sailplane – a Schweizer 1-23. By 1952 he had all his badges and was started on the way to collecting five Barringer Trophies. He had a good start on his many years of competition soaring on the local level, regional, national and world, as well as the Smirnoff Derby. Competition was his favorite form of soaring because he could measure his performance against other pilots. He also managed to set national and world records every now and then with one still standing as of this writing – Gain of Height: 12,894 meters (42,303 feet) in 1961.

He served the SSA as President and Vice President. He applied his technical know-how to sailplane performance studies and tests which were published in *Soaring* magazine.

His awards include the FAI Lilienthal Medal (1962), OSTIV Plaque/Klemperer Award (1972, first American), Tissandier Diploma (1968), Eaton Trophy (1964), Tuntland Award (1963, 1970, 1971) and the Barringer Trophy five times. He earned Silver (#93, 1947), Gold (#34 1952), Diamond (#3 Intl #7 1952), Symons Three Lennie Pin (#11).

He was famous for his Bikleisms and we can't resist including one here: *“Although, actually, I've never had any severe situations. Well, partly it's a difference in terms of*

reference – like I say, when the airplane turns over, this might be something that most people would think was severe, but I haven't had anything that I thought was endangering me in any way at all.”

Although this page is supposed to be about soaring, we also cannot resist listing two of his many projects in the Aerospace world: X-15 Rocket Airplane (4,420, mph, 67 miles altitude) and the Lifting Body Project which proved a wingless body (with L/D ~3) could be safely landed by a human pilot.



Someone once said his retirement was the end of an era. It was – both for flight test and for soaring. But it was the beginning of another era which could not have come without the accomplishments of a man like Paul Bikle.



**Left to Right: John Robinson, Paul Bikle, Scott Crossfield, Jack Lambie**



**Paul Bikle in business attire**

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