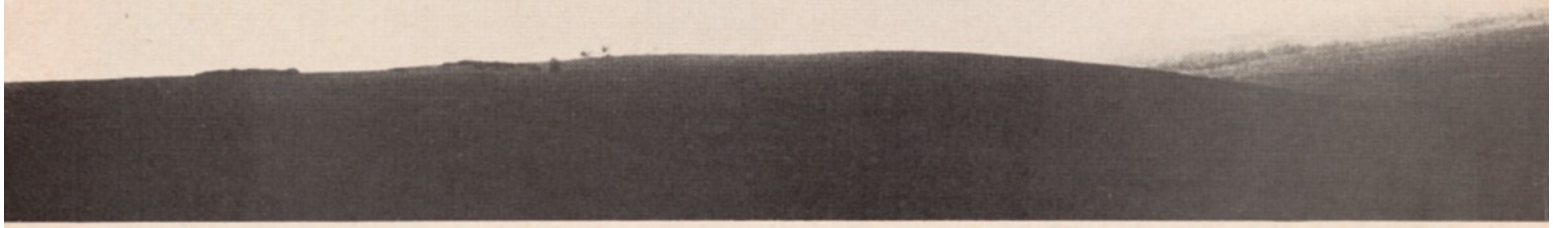
Hang 'em high

Man has always dreamed of flying like a bird. But now the legend of Icarus seems to have become reality. The secret lies in the controversial and spectacular sport of hang gliding. There have been a number of injuries, and even a death, recently as the sport becomes more popular. Last month a spectator was cut and bruised in an accident at Mill Hill, Sussex, when a hang glider crashed into two parked cars. But such dangers will not deter photographers like L. J. Bateman who took these pictures at Worms Head, Rhossili in South Wales. He found irresistible the combination of graceful gliders, sunsets and hills that drop straight into the sea. "The most difficult part was to frame the sun and the hang gliders in the ideal position, as they travel quite fast," he says. But by obtaining the co-operation of the pilots he was able to compose exactly the shots he wanted. "The pilots were most helpful," he recalls. "Sometimes, when the wind was right, they were able to hover in a given position for some time, enabling me to get the pictures I wanted. At other times I framed the sun and the horizon correctly and waited for the glider to pass." Some of the more spectacular effects he achieved by using an orange filter on his 150mm lens. This also enabled him to reduce the exposure to 1/500sec at f/16 and create false sunsets. The effect is almost a defiance of nature — like hanging high above the earth in a gently floating glider.

Flying the Wing

There is something magical about flying: ask any pilot. Yet Man has only truly 'flown' in the last few years. And in embracing the spectacular new sport of Hang Gliding has provided photographers an equally spectacular new subject.



HANG gliding has come a long way since Marlborough farmer Ken Messenger leapt off the summit of Mount Snowdon in 1973, before the eyes of a sceptical and faintly horrified crowd. Ken flew two-and-a-half miles that day but in January this year set a world record by making a 25-minute flight from a balloon (which had climbed to 12,700 feet) and journeying fifteen miles from the balloon's starting field.

From a photographer's point of view, the sport – known also as kiting or kite soaring – is a natural. It offers something for just about every taste: there is action, drama, scenery, people and, above all, a poetry of shape and motion in the flying. Visually, soaring is stunning. The impossible seems to take place. After facing into the wind, the flyer takes a few steps and suddenly seems to be going up in an immensely powerful, invisible lift. Once he is up, one wonders how he will ever get back down – yet, somehow, the whole thing seems totally natural, as if this were something Man was meant to do.

Kite soaring has little relation to, say, parachuting. In soaring, the flyer works with the wind, just like a bird. His range is limited by wind speed and by his own ability, but if he is good he can go a long way. The trick is to take off and land back on a hilltop. Once airborne, the kite can be made to soar, circle, dive, sideslip, hover and – finally – land. Lift-

Top: *Dick Bickle flies the Albatross. Nikon F (motor drive) with 135mm Vivitar lens. Tri-X rated at 800ASA. Developed in D76. 1/500sec at f/11.*

Left: *Dave Raymond in flight. Nikon F (motor drive) 135mm Vivitar. Tri-X rated at 800ASA and developed in D76. Exposure 1/500sec at f/8.*

off requires a wind speed of between 16 and 25mph, though with less wind the wing will glide gently – which is ideal for beginners.

Kiting is something which must be learned – and no reputable manufacturer will sell a kite without a course of lessons. Untaught beginners have often come to grief – needlessly, since there are a number of clubs and kiting schools around the country which will be only too happy to give the necessary instruction.

The secret of the design of the delta wing kite lies in a computer somewhere in Florida. The inventor of the first successful free-flight kite was Dr. Rogallo of the American National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA). Experiments were carried out using kites as exit vehicles, as part of the American space programme. Now, almost all kite designs are based on Dr. Rogallo's concept and the formal title for them is the Rogallo Wing. Kites are made of a light alloy framework and a wing of nylon sailcloth.

Camera Exposure

There are a couple of points to remember on the technical side. If you use a camera with a through-lens meter, it is a good idea to take readings when the kite is on the ground, for even the best metering system will have trouble handling the relative brightness of kite and (usually) brighter sky. Whilst high in the air, the flier is in the shade of the wing and so, if you wish to make detailed closeups, compensate with a little extra exposure.

When shooting colour transparencies, exposure is obviously more critical. Base your readings on the brightest part of the scene – normally the sky. A polarising filter can come into its own, given favourable conditions.

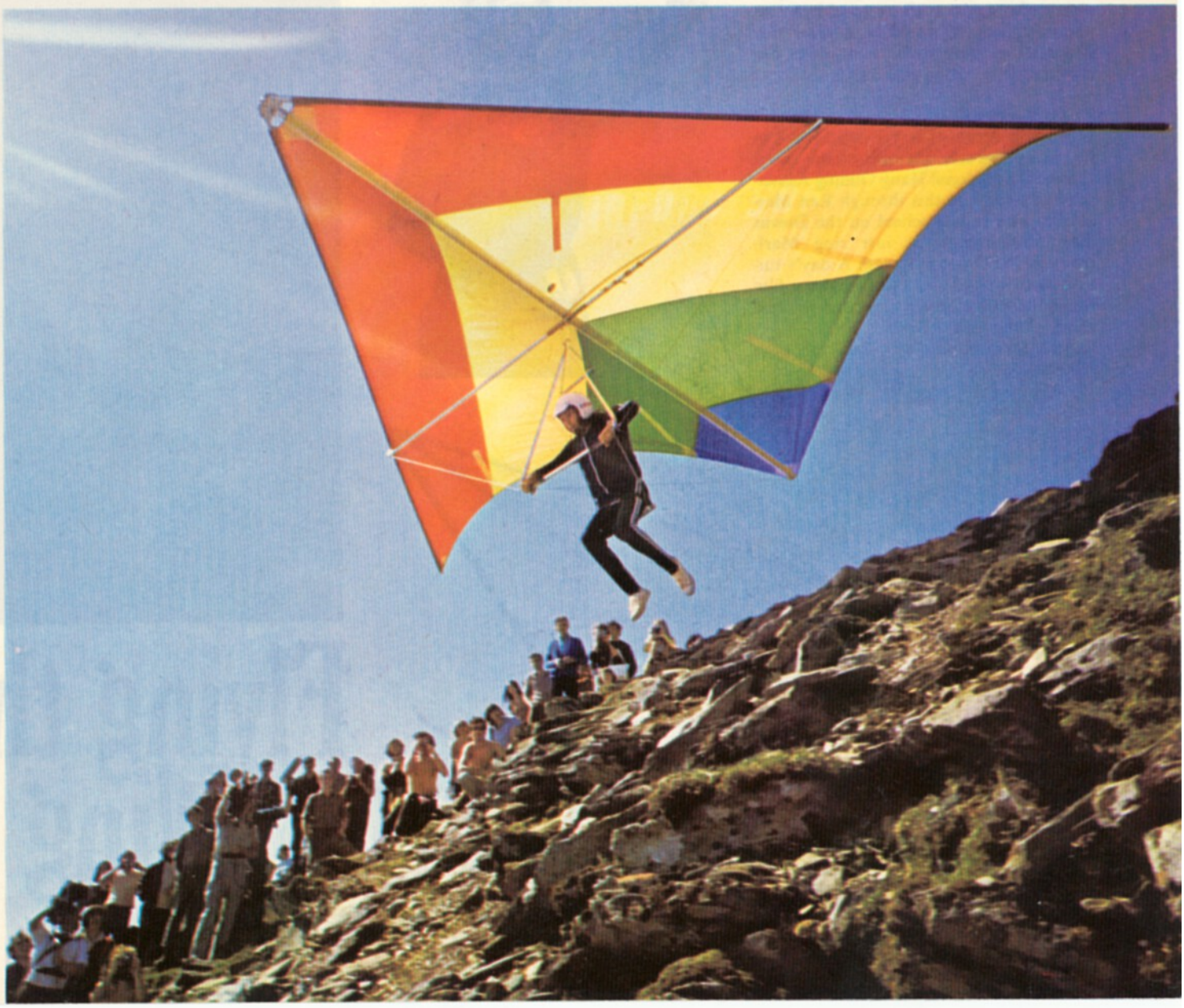
Filters for monochrome shooting can be useful, but are not essential. Very dramatic skies can be produced – with, for instance, a yellow or an orange filter. And a variation on the dramatic sky is a total silhouette: the lazy man's answer here is to produce a normal negative and then print it on hard paper.

Flare, too, can be brought into the scheme of things. You will almost inevitably shoot some frames into relatively strong light: make flare work for you, using it to give pictures that little 'something extra'. Again, hard paper can help – emphasising flare beautifully.

Meeting Manners

If you go to a kite meeting as a spectator, it is worth recalling that the land on which you stand belongs to someone –

***Below:** Ken Messenger takes off on a record-breaking flight from the summit of Snowdon. Nikon F with 21mm Nikkor lens. Ektachrome X.*



whether to a local farmer or to all of us. It is only common courtesy to avoid throwing your empty film cartons and picnic wrappers onto it. The sport of hang gliding has suffered recently from spectators who are not all as considerate as photographers. It would be a great pity if spectators were to be banned or discouraged from kiting meetings.

Try it Yourself?

When you decide that you would like to fly, as well as take pictures of the sport, contact the National Hang Gliding Association. You can do this through Ken Messenger (who runs a school on the Downs near Marlborough) – just ring Marlborough (STD 06725) 2766. A day's tuition costs around £5, and includes a film show, theoretical instruction, and the real thing – hang gliding itself.

And, for around £150, Ken will even sell you a kite.

Flying the Wing

Top Left: *Evening flight from Marlborough Downs. Leading pilot is Ken Messenger flying an Albatross kite with Dave Raymond flying behind with a lightweight Hawk. Both kites are from a range of four manufactured by Birdman Sports.*

Centre Left: *Dave Raymond checks the wind speed as soaring can only take place at wind speeds between 16 and 25 mph. Nikon F with 135mm lens. Tri-X exposed at 1/125 sec at f/11.*

Left: *Ken Messenger with the Albatross near Marlborough. Nikon F with 135mm Vivitar. Tri-X exposed at 1/250 sec at f/11 and developed in D76.*

Above: *Birdman's view of what kite soaring is all about. The flyer is again Ken Messenger who triggered the motor drive camera during his flight over the downs near Marlborough. Nikon F with 21mm Nikkor. Fujichrome exposed at 1/250 sec at f/5.6.*