



A Soaring Family

I believe all glider pilots feel they belong to a big family, but within the Italian gliding community there is a very special family, in the strictest sense. This family did much to foster the development of soaring in Italy, and one of its member conquered several world's record. They are the Orsis. 'Orsi' in Italian means 'Bears', and bears in Italy are considered to be very private. So are the Orsis, who value doing rather than talking, and have understatement as their credo. Thus it is only thanks to the stubbornness of 'Volo a Vela' Editor in Chief, Renzo Scavino, that I was able to obtain the following interview with Mrs. Adele Mazzucchelli Orsi, a world's record woman, an Italian open class champion in Rieti, and, with her family, the 'engine' of the creation of the Centro Studi Volo a Vela Alpino (Center for the Study of Alpine Soaring), and of the gliding side of Calcinante del Pesce (Varese, Italy). The Orsis have also constantly supported this magazine, and it is only thanks to their generosity that it continues to be printed. The fact that they did never interfere as far as the published matters are concerned is obviously tremendously appreciated by the magazine staff. How did you start flying? I started going to the Vergiate airfield back in 1959. My husband Giorgio and I had some friends who used to come to our home to play tennis on Saturdays and Sundays. At a certain point one of them told me: 'Tomorrow I am not coming'. I asked why, and he replied he was going to Vergiate to fly a glider. I had no clear idea of what he meant at that moment, I believed that gliders were still like the historical ones launched years before from Mount Campo dei Fiori with a bungee cord. Giorgio and I let some week-ends pass by, then decided to go have a look. We met Sergio Baldisseri who soon took each of us aloft in a two-seater, and made us true believers immediately. It is Sergio's merit if both Giorgio and I started soaring. It was a 'coup de foudre' that slowly developed into a lifelong passion. After that day we played very little tennis and spent all our Saturdays and Sundays at the Vergiate airfield, initially flying the Spatz and the Canguro. A special souvenir of Vergiate? There are many, but the outlandings just a couple of Kms from the field with Roger Biagi as my instructor are unforgettable. He maintained, and he was definitely right, that I should get accustomed to landing out, and that landing out was normal... Then I remember how happy we were when there arrived the new Polish gliders, that is the Bocians, Fokas and Muchas, and the Dornier towplane. That was an important advance for the sport of gliding in Italy, and your family

contributed in it. Then there came the new field of Calcinante - I would say a sort of creature of your father - and after a few years AMV too moved to a new place, and Capoferri created Valbrembo. A period of sustained growth. Yes, that's true. In 1961 we moved to Calcinante. This was made possible because my father, Silvio, presented me the land on which the airfield was to be constructed, and helped a lot with the building of the clubhouse. Plinio Rovesti, a well known meteorologist, was the Editor in Chief of 'Volo a Vela' at that time. The transfer to Calcinante was important because the new location permitted the weather conditions and the orography to be much better exploited. The only ridge soaring possible from Vergiate was that on the hills north of the field. From there it was difficult even to reach Campo dei Fiori and Mount Generoso with the ships we had at that time. And you started flying world's record flights. Two feminine speed records on the 100 km triangle, both single seat and two seat, the two-seater record on the 300 km triangle, the 300 km out-and-return record in a two-seater. Yes. I achieved the first record at Rieti, then there came those from Calcinante. And those from Calcinante are perhaps the records I like best, the ones from which I got most satisfaction, more than the one I flew in Australia and the one I achieved in Namibia. The reason is simple: they were the first and the most difficult ones. What do you need, apart from skill, to fly a record flight? What do you think when you try a record? When do you decide it is the right day? How important is the sailplane you fly. If you want to achieve a record - and world's records have always been my favorite targets - you need to be tenacious. Try, try and try again, this is the most important thing. The day does not need to be exceptional. You do not need to feel particularly inspired. Just try, try and try. Then, be tranquil. One should not place too much emphasis on the record attempt. You should be serene on take-off, that is committed but not anxious. I always tried to be calm when I took off, and, once aloft, to concentrate on my objective. I must also say that there were wonderful persons who helped me all along: Sergio Baldisseri, whom I mentioned before, Guglielmo Giusti, Attilio Pronzati, who disclosed me the secrets of flying with the wind, Stanislaw Wielgus, and Jochen von Kalkreuth, an unforgettable example. Eventually, having an advanced ship surely helps. You mostly achieved world's speed record. Why not altitude gains, for instance? Altitude gain records are hardly achievable in this area. Additionally, you need a specific equipment, I mean oxygen system and so forth. Distance records are fascinating, yet, what's better than a speed one? Your recentmost world's record was a two-seater speed record on a 100 km triangle. You flew it in Namibia with Katrin Keim in the back seat. Katrin (a world's record woman herself) told me that this is a very, very difficult record, yet FAI considered abolishing it. What do you think? It is definitely hard to achieve a world's record on the 100 km triangle. There are so many factors that come into play. Your tactic is paramount, then the weather conditions are extremely important. You cannot do anything wrong on a 100 km triangle. When you try to break the 500 km or 1000 km record, you may let yourself waste a minute, or fly one more spiral. No way of doing that on a 100 km record attempt. It is right that this record is kept. You participated in many gliding

contests, and fought with you male adversaries on a par. You were the Italian champion and as such took part in the World's Championships in Australia. Why were you so keen to compete? Competitions are a part of soaring. You miss some of the sport if you do not compete. I always liked being in a competition. I felt it was complementary to record and distance flights. As far as 'fighting' with men is concerned, I think gliding is perhaps one of the few sports in which there are no differences. Gliding does away with all differences. I competed against men, and I think I got a few good results. That's understatement: I read a few scoring tables and a few names: Neubert, 1st, Adele Mazzucchelli 2nd, then others listing Moffat, Holighaus, and you were there, trailing or leading them. Yes, that's true. I took part in a feminine competition only once. It was in Poland. And the German pilots gave me quite a beat. We were to fly the same glider, one I had never tested before, it was the Pirat. You also competed against your husband, how was it? It was like he was not my husband. He was just like any other pilot, apart from the titles of the newspapers in Rome that read 'Flying wife beats her husband'. You were lucky enough to have a family who shared your love for flying. Did you children follow you? My father was happy I was flying because he realized how much I liked it, my husband is a keen glider pilot. The children, conversely, do not fly. Only Silvia started out and was about getting her license, but quit before her first solo. I did not force them: either you fly with pleasure, or you do not. You got several important aviation awards, including the Majewska medal. Dr. Bazzocchi (note for the foreign readers: the 'B' in the designation of the MB-339 aircraft flown, for instance, by the Italian air force aerobatics team 'Frecce Tricolori'), told me that you did much to advance the aviation sports in Italy. Did those awards make you particularly happy? I was happy to receive them, but I certainly did not get too excited.