

News from Clubs and Members

AUTO TOWING TO 2600 FEET

Emerson Mehlhose sends us the following story: Last year, when Dame Nature robbed the old timers of the opportunity to rave about their "real old-fashioned winters", the Toledo Glider Club dusted off the wings of their Funk Two-seater and hauled it to the Maumee River. On Wednesday, February 12th, I received a letter from Edward Knight, inviting me down for the week-end to do some gliding off the ice. Our silent prayers for good weather and conditions were answered, for Saturday dawned clear and cold, and the ice was coated with enough snow to afford traction for the tow-car.

When I arrived at the base of operations on the river, I found only one member of the club—Art Shanley, who was struggling manfully with the almost impossible task of putting fitting pins in, and keeping his fingers from freezing in the ten degree temperature. After many joint tries, with mutterings and mumblings, other members of the club straggled in, generously



Preparing for the take-off

Take-off on February 23rd

admired our handiwork and marveled at our fortitude . . . when we were through with the job.

Following a lively discussion, we decided to use about 2,000 feet of wire. We had been using 1,500 feet at the airport, and although we had far more distance in which to tow on the river, we thought it justified conservatism not to give the new students too much leeway right off the bat. This was a time when the saying "Give them an inch and they'll take a mile" was true. The section of the river where the towing was to be done is three quarters of a mile wide and between four and five miles long, with several small islands along the stretch. The ice here was eighteen inches thick and covered with a thick crust of snow.

That afternoon I made one tow with the 2,000 foot line, and attained an altitude of 1,200 feet. When the angle between the towline and the glider's line of flight became about forty-five degrees near the top of the climb, I found that the pull was too great, and the tow-car could no longer gain traction, in spite of the usually successful combination of snow and skid chains. By hauling back on the stick at 1,200 feet, the tow-car could be brought to a full stop.

On Sunday the weather was even better than on the previous day. The wind was out of the Northeast, directly up the river. The fellows were out early, anxious to get in as much flying as possible under such ideal conditions. Even Nelson Bailly, whom Nature had not designed for our glider, was there. (His six feet five surrounded by two hundred and thirty pounds does things to wing-loading and cockpit sides which we sylph-like designers do not condone). With the long tow-way it was possible to get Nels higher than he had ever been at the airport. After several tows made with the 2,000 foot line, someone suggested that a new tow-car be used. A Toledo Ford Dealer offered us his courtesy car, a 1936 V8 Phaeton. By loading the tonneau with five passengers and excess baggage, the traction

of the rear wheels was increased, so that we could tow much higher.

Greatly encouraged with this result, we decided to try a very high tow—one even higher than the one made in a Cadet by Pratt Jones of Akron, Ohio. It was plain that we would need a much longer wire than when towing on ground, so we put in a safety link of quarter-inch Manilla rope, and added more and more wire in sections, making a test flight with each additional length of wire. The first addition made the tow-line 3,500 feet long, on which an altitude of 1,900 feet was attained. Bob Beverlin made a second flight on the 3,500 foot line and attained an altitude of 2,000 feet. Then another length was added, making the line 4,000 feet long, with which an altitude of 2,200 feet was attained. At this altitude we were just under some low clouds, and it looked very much as if it would snow. This time we added all the wire available, and the line proved to be over a mile in length. By this time, the simplest means of measuring the length of the tow-line was to pace it off with the speedometer of the tow-car. Visibility was so poor that we had to arrange signals with the lights of the tow-car to indicate when all was ready at the tow end, and with another car at the glider end of the line.

When all was ready, the signal was given at the glider end, and the tow-car began to take up the slack. Soon the glider started to move, and the tightening wire twanged like a harp-string. The ship took the air and climbed easily. By rocking the wing violently, I signaled the tow-car to slow up. The tow-car responded, although it was hard for the driver to see through the haze. At about 1,000 feet, I had to signal again for less speed. At this altitude the wind was stronger. The low-pitched hum of the wire grew louder and louder. The ground below was very white. Ahead loomed the high-level bridge and the tall buildings of Toledo. Directly below was an island, which indicated that I had traveled two miles. The altimeter registered 2,300 feet, but where was the tow-car? I leaned out of the cockpit and followed the tow-line with my eye to where it faded from view. I tried to locate the tow-car by guessing where the tow-line should go. Still no tow-car! Where was it? I should at least be able to see a dark blur. I had plenty of speed; too much, in fact. Did the car go through the ice? Finally, I caught sight of it—much smaller and further away than I had expected. It was then that I began to realize how long a mile of wire looks when hung on the nose of a glider. There was plenty of slack in it yet, and it looked possible to climb up through the clouds 50 feet above me. They did not look as dense as they had looked from the ground.

"Maybe we can squeeze another 100 feet out of 'er!" I muttered hopefully, as I hauled back a bit more. The speed became less. "The tow-car wheels are slipping—ease off a bit," I told myself. The speed began to increase. Then I hauled back with both hands. Stepping up, losing speed, easing off, gaining



Johnny Novak in A B C Glider Club's Franklin joins the Toledo Group on the second week-end of river towing.

Ed. F. Knight, instructor for the Toledo Gliding Club, and a future gliding pilot, standing by the Funk two-seater.