

# ENTHUSIASM *And Experience*

**THE GREATEST THRILL  
THAT COMES TO ANY  
SOARING PILOT**

by Paul Nissen

What a day! After all our preparation, the wind is straight down the newly lengthened runway, and into the Wurtsboro ridge. And wonder of wonders, that such conditions should coincide with our fall glider meet!

Earlier this morning the sky was overcast, and a light rain fell. Even though several ships had arrived the night before, the meet looked hopeless.

What a change! And what hopes of soaring! Our Schweizer all metal utility was first to be ready; so Herb Sargent, Hudson Valley's instructor, took off to feel out the ridge. He was careful to allow lots of room for landing as the strong wind demanded a cautious approach to the ridge before coming in. Several of the club members then followed Herb's example, proceeding carefully to get the feel of the wind. Lewin Barringer then requested a flight to test conditions for the Airhopper's two-place. Lewin took our little "Half Moon" up smartly on the tow; and flew rapidly down wind into the ridge, where he began to rise. After making several beats, he came in, giving us proof that the stuff was out there.

By this time, I was mentally dancing to get off. My turn soon came up, as the more experienced fellows returned from their first try. In the cockpit now, trying to relax, I adjust the safety belt, while Herb lectures me on the tow.

"Take plenty of altitude and scoot right back. Don't be afraid to cut in close. You can soar if any one can." (This because of my light weight.)

This in mind, the flags go up, yellow then green; slack's out,—*woosh!* out of our cut and climbing rapidly toward the winch. I'm watching the airspeed carefully, trying to keep it below 80 kilometers; already at 700 feet and over the winch, better cut and get around. No confusion now, pull the middle knob (spoilers on the left). Wham! What a turn, wings verticle; I must be clipping a hundred toward the ridge; and holy smoke! I'm not losing altitude. She's hitting the hill at 200 feet, now turning north along it. The air is very rough with the variometer moving erratically between 10 ft. per sec. sink and 10 ft. per sec. lift. The sink occurs over low portions of the ridge and strangely enough, over the cloud shadows as they pass.

At last my first soaring flight is in progress; now I can really learn to fly our beautiful ship. A little worried at the first turn by the terrible sink, I nerve myself to dive through it back into the lift. Much better now as the variometer begins to read positive on the return beat. Soon it is reading 10 ft. per sec. up with the altimeter starting a 360.

Glorious! now I'm up where looking is easy. How far the autumn hills stretch away. The stony tree covered ridge is receding as we soar. With all this height I think I'll venture out over the valley and see what's there. We edge out slowly against the strong head wind

to meet a very big surprise. Instead of the expected down, the green ball has jumped to 20 ft. per sec. and disappeared. The altimeter, Whew! 2000 ft.; where is it coming from? Looking up, there is a cloud street far above, and I'm rising rapidly toward it. It grows clearer and, now I can see the curling seething motion of the mass. Not wishing to be drawn into it I continue westward to try to cross a gap in the street.

What a first flight. For sometime, I've been dreaming of flying home like this, but realizing how inexperienced I am and that the fellows are waiting their turn in the ship, I know my dream must wait. However, I think I'll attempt this gap before returning.

The altitude has been steadily increasing until now it stands at 3500 feet. Here the lakes over the west ridge are visible, a lovely sparkling sight in my air viewed landscape. But the green ball again appears, and descends to it's socket and I begin to see red. It goes to 3 ft. 1 sec. sink and stays there as we move slowly out. Will that street ever get here? The altimeter is dropping disconcertingly. Now I must limit my determination if I am to get back to the field. When it falls to 1500 I'd better turn back.

At this height the approaching cloud is still far away. Wheeling, I find that I have drifted several miles from the field, and become uneasy about making it. But in the strong wind she zips right along as I watch anxiously for green. Suddenly it comes at 10 ft. per sec. and I decide to spiral. The revolving earth and red ball soon change my intention, but the boost takes me to the ridge with plenty of room. Having been up quite a few minutes, my conscience troubling me about the other boys, so diving with open spoilers, through the ridge lift, I land in a frosty but glorious "Half Moon."

I was extremely well paid in this flight, for all the work that had gone before; and not a little surprised at my good fortune. But my flight on the following day was just the opposite.

Much puffed up and overconfident, I was quite at ease in the ship. Despite Herb's warning about this mental condition (for I didn't recognize it), I took off and pulled up very steeply, taking pleasure as the green disappeared over 20 ft. per sec., and paying no attention to the airspeed. Suddenly the left wing dropped, and I was forced to cut as she whipped around to the left. Still much too confident, I started to spiral when the variometer showed 5 ft. per sec. green, and found myself starting a spin. Thoroughly scared, I couldn't think for a moment, but I must have neutralized, because she pulled right out. I then made a very undignified landing.

I hope my experience will help others to recognize over-confidence and avoid it. To all fresh green pilots I would say, "Watch the airspeed! Keep your nose down!"