

## FROM THE *Back Seat*

by Jerry Litell

### HERE IS A STORY TO SHOW YOUR NON SOARING FRIENDS

*The following story is taken from a longer one printed in "The Consolidator" describing a visit to the Torrey Pines soaring site. We enter just as the Grunau two place has landed after a short test hop.*

"We'll only get 150 feet with two up, but the wind is increasing, and there might be some thermal action," says the pilot.

"Ah, another club member from CONSOLIDATED, O. K., take a seat behind me and relax."

Before you realize it, the ship is turned around and you can sit in the comfortably cushioned rear seat under the wing, with plenty of room and ample visibility thru plastic side windows. The beautiful workmanship on the heavily varnished, plywood-covered fuselage inspires confidence but, you can no more relax than "fly in the air" as the old folks used to say. You think of that terrific angle of climb as you fasten your seat belt, wondering what happens to these things in a stall. Your pilot signals and up you go. All that you hear is the air blast against fabric and the whistling thru the small openings around the cockpits. You feel yourself pushed up, not pulled, just as your pilot further assures you that the controls are in neutral. As you look out you marvel at the rapidly unfolding panorama, the rugged canyons, the sharp edge of the more than 300-foot vertical cliff, and suddenly a broad, smooth beach directly underneath. The pilot has released, you glide over the beach, turn parallel to the cliffs, as you wonder about that updraft. It is there, allright, for your variometer shows a very slight climb. Then you glance at the field where the runways are now sharply outlined, the highway lined with trees, the rolling hills that reach up the side of conical Black Mountain, and away back the blue Laguna Mountain and Palomar, over which rise the towering cumulus clouds.

Suddenly you feel yourself pushed up. "Here is where we turn. Watch the variometer," says the pilot. "You watch the bank indicator as well and notice the turn is perfect, the ball stays in the middle. "There is usually a convection at this point. Did you notice how we climbed on the turn?" Now you are facing south. The nose of the craft points about 10 degrees more to the west than the flight path which closely follows the contour of the mesa. Looking at the glider port from this angle, makes one really appreciate its excellent location. The cliffs are not only higher here, they are almost vertical and the two flanking canyons diverge from the field to double the length of this natural deflector.

Look! There is the other ship taking off, coming right up to you. She sure is a beauty with her cream wings, mahogany nacelle, and the tail mounted on a gleaming dural tube. Now you can look right down into the cock-

pit. The pilot looks up, grinning as he slides under you. This is getting interesting. "Yes," says your own pilot, "The wind is picking up too. We may have a lot of fun." The wind has increased, you can even see an occasional white cap, but the air is smooth as you cruise back and forth.

Was smooth, you mean. Just as you cross that big canyon, you hit a bump . . . no, not a bump, a giant wave. "Yippe! We've hooked a thermal!" says your pilot, and banks sharply. You look out where the canyon, then the mesa, the beach and the ocean spin past your wing tip which seems moving backward in the tight spiral. Gradually you feel pressed into the seat as your pilot calls your attention to the variometer which shows 6 feet per second. "Just a weak one," says your pilot, "They never amount to much on the coast." You carefully keep your eyes off the spinning landscape and look at the climbing altimeter wondering what a 20 feet per sec. desert thermal feels like. Suddenly the ship falls down from under you. You seem to have lost all weight for a moment.

"Too bad, we lost the thermal. No, we didn't drop, we just stopped climbing."

Well, we are too far inland, anyway. You heartily agree, wondering how these supermen can spiral around in thermal after thermal for hours on end, to land hundreds of miles from their starting point, without ill-effects. It is no worse than spending all day in a small fishing boat, rolling and pitching with the power off.

"No, I suppose not."

Looking down you find yourself almost over the highway. Over at the field are several more cars, probably some of the other members who have come out to fly. The single seater is darting around almost at the level of the field, sometimes diving thru a canyon, then he slows up and climbs almost like an elevator . . . the wind must have freshened.

There is no lift back here. You gradually lose the 600 feet you just gained as your pilot skillfully maneuvers toward the end of the 1,500 foot landing runway. A long slip, exaggerated, because you are headed into the wind—then some rough air over the little lake, but you don't mind a trifle like that, now that you are a veteran, thermal soarer. You are just a few feet off the ground, gliding down the side of a little valley. You slide up the other side and gently touch. The noisy rumble of the landing is literally quite a comedown after the silent, effortless cavorting around the sky of a few minutes ago. And when you help push the 400 pound sail plane back for another take-off, you fully realize the tremendous power available right out of the free air to anyone who will take the trouble to learn how.