

SUN VALLEY *Soaring*

by Lewin B. Barringer

Arriving at this comparatively new but already world famous resort the afternoon of July 30th we found that half of our personnel and equipment had preceded us. Jay Buxton had come by car several days before and the Schweizer 2-seater sailplane had rolled in on a freight car that morning. John Robinson soon drove up with his "Zanonia" in tow. The next morning we unloaded the Wings Club winch from another freight train and soon were ready to find out what the conditions might be in the dry air over this part of the Rocky Mountains.

Wednesday morning found us at Friedman Field south of the town of Hailey which is 12 miles south of Sun Valley and at an altitude of 5335 feet. It took some time to unspool the old rope and wind on 6,000 feet of new 5/16 inch manila line on the winch drum, set up the ship, etc. so it was 3:36 P.M. before the first take-off. There was a freak prevailing south wind so we used the whole length of the 3500 foot one-way airport. At 150 feet the ship hit a thermal following which the climb continued with difficulty through a down wash. I released at 250 feet and then a 180 degree turn back to the starting point. One more tow was made to about 350 feet and then we had to call off flying for the day as the starter of the winch engine had burned itself out.

August 1st we had a visit from Mr. Ashby, Assistant to the President of the Union Pacific. Using Johnny's autopulley tow the ship this time got up to 500 feet to make a demonstration 360 during which strong downdrafts were encountered east of the field. On the second flight we had the first of many rope breaks which soon taught us that for this terrain, with rocky soil and sage brush, steel cable and not rope makes up the proper towline.

As Johnny had now set up the "Zanonia" we concentrated on him. After 2 short hops he caught a thermal and got away. This first one he caught at 500 feet, and worked up to 6,000 over the mountains bordering the east side of our N-S valley which was about 2 miles wide at this point. On this flight Johnny twice reached 10,000 feet above take-off. When he landed, after 2 hours 55 minutes, on the golf course at Sun Valley he reported having encountered much turbulence with many strong downdrafts of—15 feet per second. Strongest lift was 15 feet per second. On the last part of the flight he did a thorough job of checking slope soaring possibilities with a west wind of about 15 mph.

August 2nd we both made a number of winch tows to 400-600 feet but failed to catch anything. At 2:00 P.M. Johnny said that he would like to fly the Schweizer as he had not yet taken one up. I went along as passenger. After a good tow to 600 feet we hit a good one but had difficulty staying within its narrow confines. Johnny put up a good struggle which I enjoyed watching from behind. Finally drifting over the hills to the east at 2000 feet above Hailey we caught a stronger thermal of 5-7 feet per second and rose on it to 7,000 feet 40 minutes after take-off. Then we headed up the valley to Ketchum and Sun Valley. Arriving over the hotel at 4,000 feet



Left to right: John Robinson, Lewis B. Barringer, Dick Durrance, American Ski Champion

we encountered a thermal of 5-10 feet per second and climbed to 10,400 feet above take-off to set a new 2-place altitude record almost 4,000 feet above my old mark. While we were up a big grader was at work clearing a runway on a new field only ½ mile from Sun Valley. When he had it wide enough to suit us we came down and landed at 4:33. Our best altitude was 15,735 feet above sea level.

August 3rd we made our first flights off the new field where the N-S runway, cleared through the sage and weeds, was 4,000 feet long and 100 feet wide. My best of 5 flights was 4 minutes. Johnny had no better luck.

August 4th we began to learn more about what technique was needed. With weak variable winds which prevail most of the time it was best to wait, ready for take-off, until a "dust devil" appeared at the far end of the field and then go up and try to catch the thermal which caused it. I had written in "Flight Without Power" that one of these dust devils was a thermal taking off and now I had my first chance to prove this statement true beyond all doubt. I caught one weak one and manged to spiral in it for 7 minutes. Johnny did better and got away on one for a three-hour flight during which he reached 11,500 feet. This was 17,500 feet above sea level as this new field is at 6,000 feet. He reported pleasant flying with best lift of 10 feet per second with plenty of wide thermals above 7,500 feet. There were no clouds.