

THE FLYING JOHNSONS

Outstanding flights of the 1950 National Contest and of the West Coast Contest were made by the Johnson brothers, Dick and Dave. Dick is the new National Champion and Dave is the new West Coast Champion, which establishes some sort of record in monopoly. These brothers have been well known to the soaring fraternity since they started staggering around with their Northrup Primary in 1938. In 1940 they acquired the first of their three Bowlus Babies, and in 1941 the first of two TG2's. Dick finished and flew the Tiny Mite, and now has the RJ5. Dave's TG2 now holds three U. S. records. Both boys have the Golden C. Here are the stories of their spectacular flights of the '50 contests:

Dick...

The 17th National Contest crept along at an almost painfully slow pace during the first week of the competition, with the cross country distances not exceeding much more than 100 miles. The winds were mostly from the south and of course the contestants almost invariably chose a northern course. I reached Oklahoma on three occasions and failed to contact the mals almost as soon as I passed the Texas border. This was partly due to the heavy rain that fell in that area, a few days before the contest started, and partly due to the propaganda effort, that the Texans developed, about their thermals.

Anyway, by then I had decided that no more Oklahoma flights would be appropriate if I were going to get anywhere. On August 10th the weather improved but the wind remained from the south at about 15 mph. The weather map indicated that southwest Texas had the best weather, and of course a slightly longer day. Also I found there had been but little rain in that region, for the previous two weeks.

I thought to myself, "Where would McCready go in this situation? Having seen him in action many times, I knew that he wouldn't waste his time with a short run to the northern Texas border, even if he had to fight the wind to go elsewhere. Thus fortified, I chose Abilene, 160 miles west, as a goal, and was able to complete the flight so easily that I felt disappointed at not having chosen a more difficult goal.

At takeoff time cumulus clouds were forming well to the south only, with almost nothing over the field or to the north. Rather than go across the void, toward my goal, I made a detour by going 40 miles south to contact the fine cumulus there. In spite of the headwind, the thermals were really worth the time spent to reach them. From there on to Abilene it was a glorious ride in which I enjoyed abundant and vigorous lift and at no time was I in any danger of having to land. The cloudbase was only 5500 feet ASL near Grand Prairie, but increased steadily to some 12,000 feet south of Abilene. During the flight, I observed that there were no clouds at all to the north and even Abilene lay in the vacant area. By approaching downwind from the south, it was easily reached.

The weather, the next day, appeared almost identical so armed with my experience of the previous day, I set about to choose a more intelligent goal. This time San Angelo, 220 miles to the southwest, was chosen because it lay well within the cumulus area and I knew that my fast sailplane would experience little difficulty with the head and crosswind as long as I found good thermals.

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Dave...

The weather for the West Coast Championship Meet was pretty good for the entire four days of the meet which started on July 1st. The first day I made a goal flight to Needles with Marty Blackman as passenger. The weather on the third day looked as good as the previous two days so I decided to try to make Overton, Nevada. At first I was going to try the trip solo and maybe get a leg on my Diamond C, but the wind velocities were pretty low so I decided to take a passenger along which helps the speed of the TG-2. Bob Fronius volunteered as a passenger, and, by the way, was one of the most helpful passengers I have ever had.

We were all set to go by 12:00 but it was 1:00 p.m. before we took off on a double tow with Per Mullen-gracht in his LK. We made a short tow with Stan Hall as tow pilot and released at 1000 feet a couple miles to the SW of El Mirage. The thermals were just getting started then so after twenty minutes of weak stuff near the airport we hooked on to one of those good El Mirage thermals with part of the desert going up also. We were reading 3 and 4 meters up per second in this one and it wasn't long before we were up around 14,000 feet, where it gave out, so we headed toward Overton, our goal, 221 miles away.

When we left the good thermal we had several other sailplanes with us but they all disappeared on some other course or beyond us, so from then on we did not see another ship. After some 20 minutes of gliding with quite a few down areas we were getting a little worried since we were getting down fairly low and still had nothing that resembled a thermal. Finally at about 2500 feet over Helendale we worked some zero sink for a while as anything looked good at that point. It was tough going for the next 20 minutes with very weak thermals and poor speed but like the previous days of the meet conditions picked up the further East one went. We were now only about 45 miles out and the thermals were getting better, but it took about two hours to get this far due to our constant struggle with weak thermals.

From Daggett for the next 90 miles we made a little better time since there were a few cumulus which took us up to around 14-16,000 feet. However, our speed was still quite slow because it took us about three hours to make that 90 miles. At one point about 25 miles on the other side of Silver Lake we almost had to land after a long glide with no thermals, but when we were about 1500 feet above the highway near Clark Mountain we picked up just the one we needed which took us up to about 11,000 feet.

We had about given up ever making our goal since

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