

SUPER YO-YO

by L. A. MAXEY

The last day of the 1955 West Coast Contest rolled around with continued excellent soaring conditions in prospect at El Mirage. This fact was, I am certain, more pleasing to Bill Ivans and me, the "outs", than to Paul Bikle, the "in." Paul had a staggering lead of 282 points over Bill, who was 18 points ahead of me. Nonetheless, I, at least, clung doggedly to the outside chance that Paul could be caught. The situation was actually worse than the 300 points indicated, since my score of 671 already included three flights; therefore, one of these would have to be discarded in the final sum. The worst of the three was a 117-mile fiasco to Olancho. I thus had before me the monumental task of producing 417 points in one flight in order to tie Bikle's score going into the last day! My only possible course was to assume that Paul could not better his score since his worst (??) flight was a 280-mile job to Bloomington, Utah. In other words, Paul had to fly 280 miles (disregarding possible goal or goal and return bonus) before he made a point!

Never having made a flight of over 300 miles, I decided that I must make a goal and return flight, to take advantage of the 40% bonus involved. I divided 417 by 2.8 to obtain the minimum one way distance of 149 miles. Swinging an arc of that distance from El Mirage with the string on Gus Briegleb's convenient wall chart, I found that Independence Airport provided a small margin and lay on the best retrieving and soaring route. The flight was actually accomplished, but to little avail, since Mr. Bikle came through with a dazzler of 370 some miles to Toulon, Nevada, and the Championship. Thus, the flight description which follows may seem somewhat anticlimactic.

I took off in the "Jenny Mae" on airplane tow at my "demand" take-off time of 12:15 p.m. PDT, having declared on my starter's card my intention to attempt to fly to Independence, California, Airport and return to El Mirage Airport. I released the tow line at about 1400 feet

above the terrain and 1000 feet directly south of the west end of the east-west runway of the airport. I had encountered a strong thermal, and the tow plane was turning toward a northerly heading, so I released rather than be taken in that direction. When I had centered the thermal, I found it to be excellent, indeed. My rate of climb was 700 to 800 feet per minute for about 200 feet, then dropped to about 100 fpm till I reached 8700' msl. I struck out on a course slightly east of north to clear the Edwards AFB danger area, and soon hit another thermal which took me to about 11,000' msl. This was a far better start than I had ever had before on a flight north from El Mirage, and I determined to try to maintain my altitude to take advantage of the slight wind which existed, rather than shoot for optimum cross-country speed.

The procedure seemed to work very well, and I made good progress to Johannesburg by working several thermals for only 400 or 500 feet each and gliding at near maximum L/D between them. Small cumulus clouds were scattered in the area between Johannesburg and Inyokern, but the lift under them was somewhat disappointing, although I was able to attain slightly higher altitude than previously. Near Inyokern I made the decision to travel the Sierra side of the Owens Valley, because the cumuli there appeared to be heavier than those over the Coso Mountains on the east side of the valley. Consequently I left the Inyokern area and headed for the first fat cu over the low mountains on the west side of the valley entrance. My rate of sink was excessive during the entire glide of about ten miles and toward the end was over 1200 fpm. Most sailplanes would have been forced down in similar circumstances, and, had I not found lift in exactly the spot I expected it, I should have been in dire straits. While the mountainous areas of the desert produce very high thermals at times, said thermals almost invariably originate on the mountains themselves, and one must be high enough to fly

over the mountains in order to contact the thermals. Thus, at the end of the glide described above, I found myself flying into a smooth, bare cut in the mountain slope, sinking very fast, and having less than 4000' of altitude above the nearest landing area, Coso Junction, which was 10 miles away.

As planned there was a thermal over the cut. One so strong and turbulent, in fact, that I had to maintain almost 70 mph airspeed in order to control the sailplane. When I had finally centered the thermal, my rate of climb was 100 fpm at first, slackening off very gradually as I climbed. Having had my fill of low altitude for the day, I rode to the top at some 17,000', and was never below 10,000' again on the flight until my final glide to El Mirage. In spite of my now considerable altitude, I was soon sorry, for the second time during the contest, that I had chosen the Sierra side of the valley, for the cumuli were well back over the range, where one miscue might mean an extremely dangerous landing, especially in the fast ship I was flying, and a well-nigh impossible retrieve.

After a glide of about 10 minutes, I attempted to contact a cloud which was fairly near the valley, but succeeded only in losing several hundred feet of altitude and several minutes of precious time floundering in turbulent air which averaged zero sink. Soon afterward, however, I was fortunate to find a good thermal which had not yet produced a cloud, and gained back to about 16,000' in good time. I now had enough altitude to glide to my turning point and arrive with fair altitude.

My ground crew, Irving Prue and Frank Kerns, had parked the trailer at Little Lake in order to stay ahead of me, and were proceeding with more than legal haste to the airport at Independence. As luck would have it, our radio communications became faulty as I approached the goal, but the crew was able to receive my instructions to signal me with a mirror as soon as I had been identified and properly witnessed making my turn around the center of the airport.

Extremely good fortune greeted me at the goal, in the form of a good thermal (about 500' per minute) directly over the center of the airport. My witnesses at the turning point were Mr. Lew Pronty, the Airport Manager; Mrs. John McMurray, a

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