

# "ALIBI"

*The Story of Flying and Winning the 22nd National*

by KEMPES TRAGER

This is an account of how 'Alibi' and her Crew won the 22nd National at Elmira, New York.

Before we go into the daily flights, I believe the readers would be interested in knowing a little about the sailplane, which we have in fun, named 'Alibi.'

First off, she didn't just happen; but is the end-result of 20 years of effort, two other gliders, and a lot of serious thinking of exactly what a contest ship and trailer should consist of. Each feature of 'Alibi's' design is, in the author's opinion, a compromise between ultimate performance in the air and ease of handling on the ground, either by the pilot landing in the wheat, oats, etc., or of assembly by the crew. The latter by the way, can be accomplished in 10 minutes, by two men if necessary.

'Alibi's' high wing and rather excessive dihedral is mighty comfortable when landing in the tall stuff. Her wing tips are well up out of harm's way. So is her fuselage, as the retractable wheel, which is out a full diameter, and has so far, held her above the small stones which one may expect. In fact, the skid becomes almost a has-been and could easily be dispensed with.

'Alibi's' wing still contains the spar of an LK, but that is all—her aspect ratio is up to 16-1, and hours, 500 of them, have gone into her surface condition. Even the built-in twist is nearly all taken out. The tip plates are simply to protect the 500 hours of effort.

I cannot give performance figures as yet, but we have plans to acquire an accurate compiling this fall. I can say that it was no problem to push the ships I chanced to meet in flight, either between lifts or in the thermals.

Well, here we go to Elmira—drove the last tail rivet on Saturday; lengthened the trailer and made temporary wing saddles on Sunday morning. Johnny Bierens was still wiring tail lights, etc., when Helen called us in

for lunch at 3:30. Then we were off. Detroit to Elmira, some 460 miles, which put us on Harris Hill at day-break Monday. Tired but happy to be there, with a few good airplane tows to look forward to, in order to test the new wings and metal tail; for even if they are contest flights, a ship must be tested sometime and this—was that time for us!

Fellows, it had been three years since we sat in a glider, but at long last, after all the getting ready, checking 'Alibi' again, remembering the barograph, telephone numbers to call, maps, drinking water, pink landing cards, blue take-off cards (or were they coral?), we finally feel the rope tighten and off we go to catch the 17 other contestants ahead of us.

It took 'Alibi' and her pilot just about one hour to realize this was not their day. First in order, our late take-off allowed a thunderstorm to develop between us and our intended goal. To the lucky guys who got out ahead of it "what a break," but for us *NO*; and besides, 'Alibi' felt more than just a bit tail-heavy. Enough so that loose shoulder straps were necessary to keep her nose down. So, better to set down in a good easy spot and try again tomorrow. Thirty-two miles—32 points, but some of the others raked in close to 200 by comparison. Oh well!

The second day is upon us. Is it good or bad? The weather was bad, which in a way, was a break, giving us time to adjust 'Alibi's' tail heavy condition and check-hop her again. The adjustment was easy. We removed the tail cone and 3# of lead ballast, which was right for the old plywood tail, but not the new metal tail.

A folded blanket for a back rest completed the job and she flew hands off. What a relief! From here on, I felt that 'Alibi' would do her part, if only the pilot would get on the ball.

July 7. The Contest starts officially, for us. This being a task day the Contest Board picks a goal flight to Du-

Pont Airport near Wilmington, Delaware, 177 miles with a speed factor tossed in. At least 'Alibi's' pilot did not have to unscramble the weather mumbo-jumbo and pit that part of his skill with the other Contestants. This in itself, was a good break.

To get down to the flying of today's race, 'Alibi's' Crew, ground and air, decided it was more important to get there, than to try for speed and perhaps not make it. So, the longer but safer route, by the way of Sunbury, was selected and flown with ease.

Cloudbase was reached within a few minutes after releasing from tow, and the total day's flying was rather uneventful. We drifted from cloudbase to cloudbase and no effort on the part of 'yours truly' was made for speed. However, we again had a late take-off and this, coupled with a longer route, put us in Wilmington rather late. In fact, we were the last to set down on that beautiful grassy DuPont Field. I am afraid the pilot muffed this one too, because with the later hours comes poor visibility. Less than 2 miles and 'Alibi' being anxious as she was, sailed her pilot right by the goal, and only the sharp navigating of said pilot when he saw the city proper, saved the day. It took one more lift and about a total of 15 miles to get landed at that most beautiful, but hard to see, field. Right then I told myself, if this is the result of driving the Bonanza for eight years, perhaps we better carry a needle too.

Of the 29 who started, we were one of the 6 to make it, and in the money too. Not the fastest, but still in there, and without trying for speed either. Perhaps 'Alibi' doesn't like her name, and is just giving us a small sample of things to come.

While the DuPont people fed 'Alibi's' air crew on steaks, ground crew was struggling to make the goal with a loose trailer hitch. John B. and Dad missed a good meal but the DuPont people took care of them too—by going out of their way to make necessary repairs to car hitch, etc. All this took time, but we did manage to beat the sun into Elmira and snatch a few hours rest before the circus of blue cards and red buttons started all over again.

July 8 and the 11th day of Competition. 'Alibi's' Crew are nearly bushed, no time for pilots meeting or weather briefing at 9:00, for an extra hour's sleep is more important. Because Gene Miller has appeared from Miami to lend his shoulder to the crew, we sleep as late as we can while Gene takes