

CROSSCOUNTRY

A LA

HUMMINGBIRD

by GEORGE A. DOWNSBROUGH

Since the Hummingbird was to be finished late in July in California, and our plant would be closed the first two weeks in August for summer vacation, I thought it would be an interesting venture to initiate the ship on a crosscountry flight to the East. We felt that the trip would be too strenuous to undertake with two, and furthermore, having a two-place ship, we wanted to share our experience with someone else. Conceivably such a trip might prove to be quite rigorous and accordingly it was felt that the selection of our companions for the expedition would have to be made with considerable care. This however turned out to be one of our easiest problems to solve as Dave and Tiddum Potter, who had been quite active during the past couple of years at Wurtsboro, appeared to have the right interests and temperament and were quite willing and ready to join us. It was decided that California to New York was too much to attempt in the time available and accordingly we would start our flight at Denver and proceed easterly as long as the vacation lasted. Saturday, July 30th, was set as the rendezvous time and Sky Ranch Airport just east of Denver, was selected as the place.

Ted Nelson was very cooperative in the proposed venture, and arrangements were made with him for trailering the ship to Denver by Andy Anderson who had worked with him on the Hummingbirds over a period of years, and was well acquainted with the ship and the problems of trailering.

I had business in Denver on Friday the 29th and met Andy at the airport in mid-afternoon. After setting up the ship, washing off the grime from trailering through Nevada and over the Rockies, we took a test hop and everything proved satisfactory with the new Hummingbird, but soaring conditions were poor.

That night Dave arrived from California, then Margaret and Tiddum arrived in the car with which we were to pull the trailer back East, hopefully without the glider. At midnight Ted Nelson and his wife and son unexpectedly arrived in Denver. The ship which he had sold me was not number two as planned, but number one, the first all metal Hummingbird which he had built. I had the feeling that Ted hated to part with number one. He had put a fantastic amount of time, effort and thought into the Hummingbird and now the first sale was consummated, it was hard for him to let go of his brain child.

The following two weeks provided us with a great deal of flying, many interesting experiences and an association with Midwestern people which we will long remember. We have been asked to tell some interesting points of our trip for "Soaring" and this probably can be handled best by a chronological review of the period.

Saturday morning, July 30th, we were out at the airport fairly early as there were many things to be done. The variometer had not worked on the test flight so Ted Nelson undertook the installation of a substitute. A receiver and transmitter from an airplane were installed in the car by Andy Anderson and all the gear which was being provided by Ted with the ship had to be transferred to Potter's car for our trip East—not the least of which was 43 lbs. of lead for Margaret to use in solo flying.

Several soaring enthusiasts from Denver and business acquaintances from United Airlines had arrived to see the Hummingbird and watch our flights, as well as reporters and photographers, so that confusion reigned prior to takeoff, which was finally accomplished at 11:50 a.m. There was a considerable amount of skepticism around the airport about getting the ship off at an elevation of

5500 feet with the existing very high temperatures and with a 40 hp. engine. However, in about 10 minutes we were 2500 feet over the ground and cut off the engine. Incidentally this engine time proved to be the maximum, for on our subsequent flights we climbed to 2000 feet over the field, which generally took less than 10 minutes.

The engine had been a little rough while climbing in the thermals, so we called Sky Ranch Unicom and asked them to contact Ted Nelson for us. When Ted answered our call he advised that he felt the turns were too steep, that we were pulling too many G for the fuel pump and hence the rough action of the engine. He was sure that everything else was quite satisfactory.

We had been fortunate before take-off to have available the weather facilities of United Airlines, through the courtesy of Mr. Beckwith who advised that conditions should be somewhat better than they had been on Friday with a 5 to 8 knot wind south-southwest up to 20,000 ft. He also had advised that there would not be much change in weather conditions for the next three days, so we thought we had better take a pretty careful look at the thermal activity while trying out the ship. At 1:00 p.m. conditions had improved considerably and we had 8000 ft. over terrain. I asked Dave what he would like to do. He immediately said "let's be on our way; there is too much confusion on the ground; there's no point going back there."

In planning the trip we had decided to fly along U. S. Route 34 rather than proceed along the airways, since it would be better driving for the crew and further, there was a fair distribution of small towns with their associated small airports. At 1:30 which was our next radio check time with the car, we found they were still at Sky Ranch trying to assemble all the gear and re-pack the car. We advised them that we would leave messages with Akron Radio and proceed on course. This method of relaying messages through the CAA stations along our route proved to be extremely useful and it is recommended that one give careful consideration to this method of making crew contacts on cross country flying.

It was necessary to go North somewhat in order to contact Route 34, so that our next couple of hours were spent flying in a northeasterly