

PT-23 practically on the crystalline surface of the lake as he whirled around for a landing, Gus dropped the towline and braked to a stop 300 feet in front of Cherokee II's nose. Unidentified hands snapped the line into the towhook and slipped the canopy down over my head. Before I could reflect upon the probable course of events to come we were moving. We left the ground at once and suddenly Cherokee II became taut, responding quickly to every instinct-guided control movement.

I concentrated on keeping Cherokee II even with the top of Gus's rudder, following immediately every motion of the towplane. The air over the desert was warming rapidly now, and the turbulence was causing Cherokee II to bob about on the end of the towline like a steelhead eager to be away.

I stole a quick glance to the side for my first look at the wings. As I

Cherokee II figured out. I looked down at the lake bed and saw the car, the trailer, and a cluster of what had to be people. I wondered what my wife was thinking. And I wondered what the fine people who built Cherokee II were feeling as they watched their handiwork spiralling rapidly out of sight.

I spotted Ross Briegleb and the BG-12 a few miles away and decided to join him. When I arrived in his thermal I was amazed to see that it was already well populated with other sailplanes, including Bertha Ryan and her 1-26. She'd made it.

As I rolled Cherokee II's little 40 ft. wing into a turn, I decided that I would give up my thousand foot advantage over the others only under the direst of circumstances. I didn't have to. Having beaten the rest of the mob to the top of the thermal, I set off at a thousand feet per minute down for "greener" pastures.

In the middle of a reflection about where I might find my next thermal, Bill Ordway and Sven Ingels sneaked up alongside in their big yellow TG-3A, Sven shooting pictures like mad.

We played the hawk and sparrow for a half hour or more, until the sparrow tired of the game and headed for the nearest Cu. Again the lift was gigantic, and soon we reached the cloud base at 13,500 ft., MSL.

The cloud was wet and thin lines of water streamed back over the canopy. Occasionally little bursts of rain would beat against the sailplane and above the noise I could hear distant rumblings of thunder.

Not having a turn and bank indicator aboard I pressed Cherokee II's nose down to stay out of the mist. I came whistling out from under the wet, gray canopy at 110 mph, pulled up and around, and slid back under for another completely effortless trip into the mist.

This went on for nearly two hours, and with every passing minute our confidence in one another, Cherokee II and me, increased.

I stalled her several times, each time a little steeper. In spite of the fact that her wing is untwisted, she refused to drop off except when forced to by unreasonably high stall angles.

When coaxed into a spin she would spin almost straight down. I made two, four-turn spins in each direction and a 10-turn spin to the right. About every third turn she acted as though she might want to raise her nose a little, but after a half turn she would drop it again. We lost 200 ft. per turn. Recovery was smooth and rapid. My confidence growing even more, I looped the sailplane several times, each loop going smooth and straight all the way around.

During normal flight I found Cherokee II very quick on the rudder, quicker than most. The ailerons were somewhat less quick but entirely adequate. The only complaint I might have (other pilots who subsequently flew the ship had similar comments) is when wrestling one's way up out of the towplane's slipstream the ailerons lag a little longer than they should. Elevator control was excellent, and so was fore and aft trim. She flew hands off and would hold a turn without my feet on the pedals. Visibility from Cherokee II is unparalleled. All pilots who have flown her make this their first comment.

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Frank Kerns and George McGinnis check last minute details just before the tow rope tightens.

did so the towplane took a gigantic surge upwards as one of El Mirage's famous thermals dug in its heels. I tripped the release at once, and, reading a rather anemic 800 ft. on the altimeter, I layed Cherokee II into a turn. The rate of climb indicator and the altimeter went crazy as we rose from the desert floor at better than a thousand feet per minute.

We whirled around a dozen times, two dozen, three dozen. Mechanically I checked the rate of climb, adjusted the airspeed, watched the horizon, listened to the wind sliding over the canopy. I did all these things with the scientific detachment required of a test flight, yet finding enough childlike wonderment within me to thrill to this new adventure.

After a few more turns I had

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(Editor's Note: Several potential builders of the Cherokee II were perturbed by the restriction placed on this machine at the last National Soaring Championships at Grand Prairie. It should be made clear that the CAA in California restricts all home built aircraft to a radius of 25 miles for the first 50 hours. The Contest Committee and Lloyd Licher, the pilot, in view of the California CAA regulations and because this ship had less than 50 hours, had no option but to withdraw the Cherokee from the contest.

Stan Hall also failed to mention that further information on the Cherokee II can be obtained from Frank Kerns, 8742 Park Street, Bellflower, California.)

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