



THE 23rd THROUGH POLAROIDs

by L. A. MAXEY

The fanfare is over and the Twenty-third National Soaring Contest has begun. The Jenny Mae is being edged up to the take-off area, looking more sleek than ever with her new surface and paint job. I had said, "Give us weather to work with, and I'll have no excuse." And Texas has thrown down the gauntlet.

The first day's task a short goal and return to Mineral Wells. Johnson has lit the pilot light. His hand is just beginning to edge toward the main burner valve. Bikle already aloft; Thomson, too. Should be able to average 50. Why not use the strongest part of the day? Say one o'clock take-off, 3:30 landing. I'd chosen 12:50; should be right.

Charts laid out with coded stations at 10-mile intervals. Tow ticket and take-off card made out. Radios checked. Canteen filled and in the cockpit. Cap and hair wet down and almost dry again. How hot can it get? In the take-off line. They're running 20 minutes behind schedule. Those cu's are getting too heavy; should be up there now, 15 minutes ago! Will I get the Waco? Yes! No, he has to gas up. Tell the cub pilot 70 and release south of the field. The lid comes down! Ye Gods it's hot, let's go! What does that thermometer read? 131? It must be busted. We're rolling. Some air at last. Right in the kisser. Ah!

Three hundred feet, antenna down, radio on. Six hundred feet, gear up.

Does this guy know this is supposed to be a race? Every time we hit a thermal he turns out of it. We'll never get to 2000. Thirteen hundred feet, ha, you really goofed that time, ran right thru the middle of one. Cut! Rack it over, ease off, in a little more, that's got it! 500 fpm? Looked better from the ground. 5000 feet. 300 fpm and ragged. Never win a race at this rate. "34K, heading out, over." "34K ground, roger, out." Lynn Brown's Skyrafter radios had become well nigh indispensable; it was hard to remember what it was like to fly in a contest without their help.

Under that next cu. Nothing. That next one looks good, but with 4300? No. Take that wisp off to the left. There's the down; here it is; hold that airspeed; now! 500 fpm again; seems solid, though. 6000 feet; ragged again. Now, some of these things *must* go to cloud base. The fat ones here all seem to be dead or dying. That area southwest of Fort Worth looks good. Still not in safe reach, though. Press a little more; the curve says 90 between for 500 fpm climb. But my average has been less than 500. Oh, alright, make it 85; you've only been flying 75. But look at the altitude, we're back down to 4000. So what are you going to do, pick out a field?

Wow! What a down! You're really in the soup now, brother. Turn up-wind. 2800! It's got to be here! How can this thing be reading 100? You're

barely moving over the ground. Must be a roll. There's some up! You turned too soon! Around again at last. Now straighten out. Hold it. Now turn. Down again on the north side? Keep working south every turn. Now you've got it. And how! 900 fpm.

There's Jock; seems to be having his troubles too; took off well ahead of me. Look at that show-off, spiraling up inside my turn! He's welcome; I wouldn't want to be in that latter-day Minny with this cross wind.

Six thousand five hundred feet, down to 600 fpm. Let's find some more of that 900 fpm stuff! Now you can reach those fat ones. Go, boy, go. "34K ground from 34K, things are looking up. Hold between Fort Worth and Weatherford, over." "34K ground, wilco, out."

This is too easy, 8000 feet 10 miles from the turn, and another big one just short of the turn, mit gliders in, yet. OK you're out of the down, start slowing up or you'll never be able to snag that core. Wow! Look at that climb. Well, turn! Hey you guys, come over here. Can't you see I'm out-climbing you? 8500 feet, that's close enough. If you hurry you can get this one again after you've made your turn. "34K, Over the turn." Where's the marker? Maybe they haven't put it out. Where in the — — there it is! Sketch it; note the time; now, git! That cloud is still good. Leave at 8000. Another fair one northeast of Weatherford to 7500. "34K ground,