THE 23rd THROUGH POLAROIDS

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I had little difficulty envisioning a variety of ways in which that lead could evaporate. The weather turned out to be excellent, and I completed the task without ever having a real scare, arriving back before Al Backstrom could drop his hamburger and grab his watch. The win put me 859 points ahead of Schroeder, 954 ahead of Thomson, and 1,109 ahead of Bikle. One down and two to go! I had only to score 142 points on the final day to win. But there was no way of computing what percentage of the course distance that would represent. If I failed to complete the task, one pilot who did might average 60 mph and another dribble in at 15 mph. In that case I'd have to complete roughly 60% of the distance, assuming that Schroeder got the 1,000 points. No, I couldn't relax even on the last day.

The contest committee grudgingly announced a triangle course only 93 miles long. The first thermal was unimpressive, topping out at 5,000 feet above the field. From there I had zero sink to within a mile of the first turn at Russell Feld, south of Fort Worth. I then got my last scare of the contest when I flew into a seemingly bottomless pit, and was down to 2,500 feet before I quit sinking at a thousand fpm. Finally I found a thermal (or vice versa) and made the first turn at about 6,000 feet. Over east Fort Worth I ran into a lulu which took me to 8,500 feet in a hurry. The sky toward Denton was filled with big, billowing cumuli, and I was able to be pretty choosey all the way. After rounding the second turn I went all the way to cloud base at about 9,000 feet. From there I held about 115 mph until it got so rough I had to slow down. Then I had to use full dive brakes at 100 mph for the last five miles to hit the field. In spite of every intention to the essence of conservatism, my last day's flight was worth another thousand points.

I had so disciplined myself against premature rejoicing, that the realization of my victory did not come at once, but rather seeped in over a period of days. When it had fully arrived, the feeling was surely worth every erg of mental and physical effort that had been expended in its attainment.

Throughout the preceding paragraphs, I have been rather hard on the

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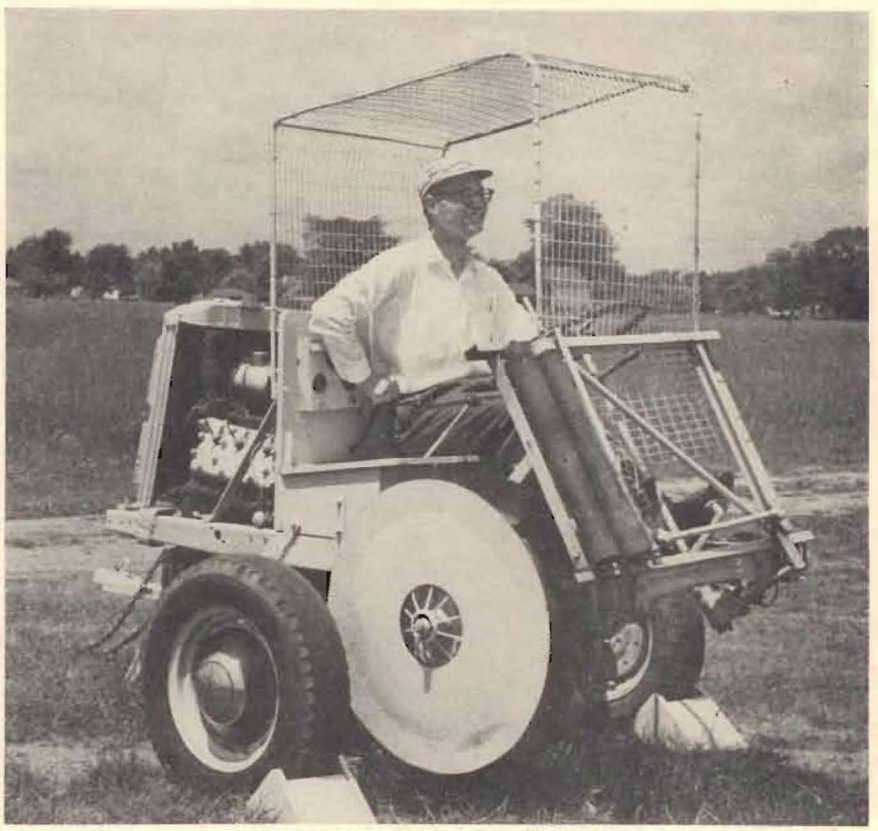
THE VULTURES WINCH

by Dr. Harner Selvidge



Kit Drew at the controls of the Vultures winch. Photo: Dr. H. Selvidge

This winch was made from a Ford V-8 chassis. The frame and drive shaft were shortened and the drum welded on in place of one of the rear wheels. For transportation, two free-turning wheels are mounted on a fixed axle, as shown, and the winch can be towed by a regular trailer hitch mounted on the engine end. A folding leg under the hitch is lowered when it is not being towed.

The regular brake, clutch and gear shift are used, the pedals being mounted so as to be in the normal position for the operator. A hand throttle is used. The steering wheel and gear were remounted so the steering arm operates the level-wind rollers which are traversed back and forth by the steering wheel.

Standard operating procedure is to put the transmission in high gear, and after taking up the slack, the throttle is gradually advanced to wide open while simultaneously slowly letting in the clutch. Second gear is used if the wind is greater than 20 mph, but gears are never shifted during a tow.

Towing is done through the shroud lines of a small parachute (4 to 6 foot diameter) which is connected to the wire through a swivel. This minimizes the chances of the chute getting twisted and failing to open.

The choice of tow wire has always been a very serious problem. For some time a 13 gauge 0.091 inch oil tempered medium hard drawn steel wire was used. This wire was very easy to kink, and every kink eventually meant a break. It was possible (just barely) to splice it by twisting it by hand. The splices would not pull out, but would frequently break where the wire was bent unevenly.

Since November 1955, hundreds of tows have been made with only two breaks, using a wire manufactured

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