

# THE UNIQUE ADVENTURES OF A 1-26

by PETER M. BOWERS

In the few short months of its existence, my Schweizer 1-26A, N51Y, has had a rather interesting career. To begin with, the down payment on the kit came from a rather unusual source—an insurance company. This was the result of my having been run down by a car while taxiing an Aeronca C-3 airplane on the airport at Arlington, Washington. (SOARING, Nov.-Dec., 1954, Page 22.)

Later on, as the kits got into production, I landed a nice free-lance

go. Finally, with the 1956 Northwest International meet less than two months away, I hauled the ship down and got to work on it. This was mostly a night-time project, thanks to the demands of the regular job, other projects, and week-end flight instruction and participation in normal glider operations.

Finally, on June 29, the day before the meet, the shiny red-and-white 1-26 was ready. I took a day off from work for the CAA inspection and flight

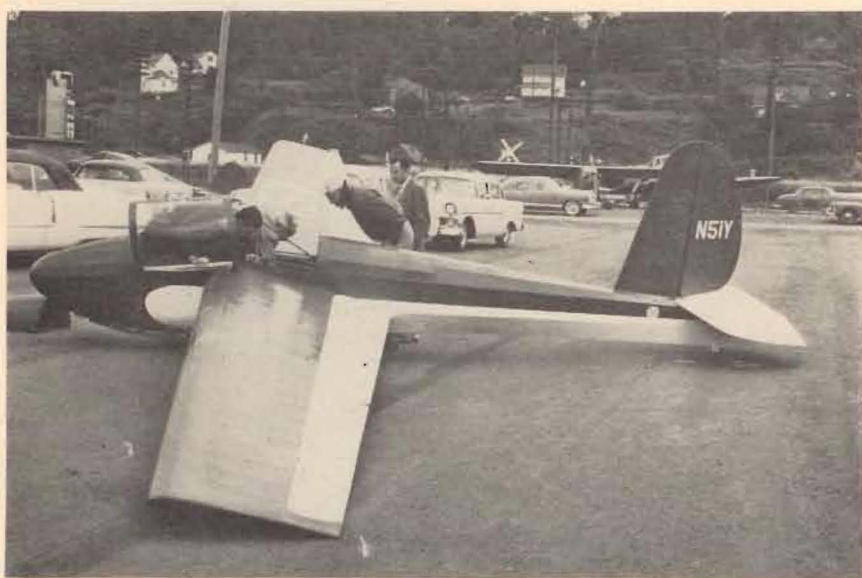
to try and get permission to use Boeing Field for the test. Traffic was heavy there, and no gliders had operated from the field since before the war, but I called the tower and asked if I could use one of the taxiways. To my surprise, the chief operator turned out to be an old glider hand who was quite interested in the project. He told me to use the main 10,000-foot runway, and that he would send out a radio car to coordinate the operation.

The ship was set up early in the morning for the inspection, and a time was set for some of the boys to slip over from work for the flight operation. The inspection was on items that had slipped by my own inspection because of being half asleep as the result of almost a solid week of calling it a night at 2:30 or 3 a.m.

All that was required in the flight demonstration was proof of controllability, so I arranged to make the two low tows behind my car, one down the runway and one back, using a 175-foot tow rope. This operation was sandwiched in between B-52 jet bomber landings and takeoffs with amazing results. The first one was made right after one B-52 had landed and another had taken off from the same runway. With the wind almost calm, I got the 1-26 into the air quickly, and held it down until I was past a photographer who was stationed at the side of the runway. After that, I pulled up to the top of the rope and released about 1000 feet down the runway, using surplus speed to reach a top altitude of 200 feet.

At this altitude, I started a few S-turns to feel out the controls. Everything felt fine, but when I looked at the instrument panel, I was surprised to find that I still had the same altitude. After flying straight ahead for a bit while tapping the altimeter, I STILL had the same altitude. The reason was soon apparent—the two B-52's had heated the runway with their jet blasts, and the heat that had been absorbed by the concrete was now being released in the form of a long thin thermal that was keeping me airborne far beyond my expected landing point. Now that I realized what the score was, I tried for all the distance I could get, and touched down only 1000 feet short of the far end of the runway, a straight-ahead glide of 8,000 feet from a release altitude of 200 feet. Forty-to-one on

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Inspecting Pete Bowers' new Schweizer 1-26A before its first flight at Boeing Field, Seattle, June 29, 1956, are (l to r) Peter M. Bowers, CAA Engineer Vern Gardner, CAA Safety Agent Ed Leach and CAA Safety Agent Bert Averett.

writing job that was worth just about the difference between the complete kit and a semi-finished factory job. This opportunity to escape some 500 hours of shop work by putting in something over 100 at the typewriter was too good an opportunity to pass up, so I changed my order.

The big crate was delivered to the shop late in June, 1955, and was promptly dismantled so that the glider within could be admired. Following this, the glider was hung up in the rafters to get it out of the way, and there it remained for nearly a year. I was always going to get at it "next week," or at the most, "next month." You know how those things

demonstration because the CAA does not work on weekends. The inspection was no problem, but the flight demonstration was. This could not be avoided, since the Aircraft specification in CAA's books stated that kit-built 1-26's had to demonstrate flight characteristics. Mine had been mostly factory-built, but was enough of a home-built by CAA standards to require the flight demonstration.

With the regular gliderport over 50 miles from town presenting one problem, and the need to get several of the glider gang together on a working day to help with the flight operation presenting another, I figured that it would be worth the effort