

## BEGINNER'S LUCK

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that I was very busy, having planned to stay only an hour. "I'll have to be going now." It makes me shudder to think how close I came to missing the sport at that moment. Why come back? Don Barnard must have read my thoughts because he twisted my arm for a good five minutes. "We have only lost three quarters of an hour. The LK is on the line, the tow ship is ready, nobody is waiting like they are on Sundays. Just one short ride. You can be back in twenty minutes." Etc., etc. Against inclinations I gave in.

The instruction ride lasted an hour and ten minutes and at last I was getting the feel of the ship. After a respectable landing I got ready to hurry back to work. This time he stopped me with one brief sentence: "How about taking her solo?" Five instruction flights under my belt; two hours and fifty minutes total glider time. I was not too busy.

Fifteen minutes rest to let the stomach settle down, (much better now but still not giving unqualified endorsement to the circling), a cigarette, a candy bar; last minute instructions, safety belt and shoulder harness fastened, canopy down, altimeter set on zero, clock set at high noon—a shout and the wings held level, tense anticipation, the towline drawing taut—then the sound of the wheel rolling, the kiss of the air as I pulled off the runway, the shallow dive to let the towplane come up, and we were airborne on my first solo in a sailplane.

Just before takeoff we had seen Derek Van Dyke in his Pratt-Read, close to the field at 1800 ft. When he saw me leave he started to climb again. I released at 2000 in good lift and started after him, soaring carefully and gaining by slow degrees. At 5400 I caught him and once got fifteen feet above, then lost the advantage. He began flying so close I thought he would come right into the cockpit and I ran away into a weaker part of the thermal. After working here a few minutes more the lift weakened and I flew north in heavy sink until getting new lift at 4000 over a small hill. This time I got up to 6000, 900 higher than I had ever been, and decided to try my luck over Scarface Mountain. This is a precipitous ridge about a thousand feet high, eight miles east of Falcon, with a broad stripe of yellow stone running horizontally across its length

near the top. It lies in a north-south plane and I theorized that the strong west wind blowing against the face might produce good lift. Flying in medium sink I spent 1200 feet of altitude getting to the north end of the ridge and turned right to fly along its crest. No lift, and I was too low to spend much more time this far from the field with a headwind going back. Suddenly I thought of turning downwind in case lift at this altitude might be leeward of the crest. Nervously the turn was made—a little low over very rough terrain on first solo with a headwind to buck on return. I set thirty seconds as my limit. In fifteen seconds the variometer needle jumped, then slowly went from "sink" to "steigt," 3 meters, 4 meters, 8 meters! (Don's enthusiasm is so contagious that his variometer has caught it. In strong lift it shows a rate of climb an F-86 could not match.) 4500 and going up fast



On the take-off line of Joe's first National Soaring Contest, Grand Prairie.

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again. 5000, 6000, 7000, with a growing sense of triumph and achievement unlike anything I had ever experienced. Finally the altimeter showed 7600, within 650 feet of the ASA altitude record. The lift weakened and I headed home, arriving over the field with 4000 to play off in a sharp spiral. Now the landing. 500 ft., just right going into the downwind leg. Remember now, just one chance! Take it easy, not too high, not too low. 350', turn left base. Airspeed right on 50. 200', turn final, airspeed right, straighten out, O.K., ease up on the speed a little—spoilers now, over the ditch; now spoilers off and straight ahead, plenty of field left. Touchdown! Almost perfect! The speed wore off and using just a little brake I stopped a few feet from Don Barnard at the end of the runway. He ran up to congratulate me with a grin on his face which grew bigger when I told him I had made 7600. Time: 1 hour and 20 minutes. With me there was only one thing to say: "Now I know what all the shouting is about."

At the time I did not realize I had forfeited membership in the informal national fraternity of power pilots and had gained admission to the world fraternity of soaring pilots, or that I would never again have any peace on a good soaring day until there was a sailplane strapped to my hind end and the towline was drawing taut.

Three days later the Pratt-Read was cracked up and broken past repair. Then Jerry Robertson lost his LK fuselage in a fire at Tempe. It was an acid test for the ASA; just when things were looking up to lose 80 per cent of the ships in a period of three weeks. But Don's LK was still flying and the weather held good. The unofficial record of ASA was 8250 above terrain, set by Roy Graves in September 1955. On Saturday 21 April Roy Smoots broke this with a flight to 8600. Next day Don went to 8700; he held the record an hour and a half. After one failing attempt

I caught very strong lift and went to 13,000 a.t. (11,600 gained). Time: 2:10. This flight was used for my C pin. The next week; a 40 mile out and return with no observer at the turn point. The following week, a forced landing in the Salt River bed and a five hour struggle to get the sailplane out. 10 June; private glider license; 1 July, the Baby Albatross finally got out of the hospital, and I was air-towed back to Falcon. July was filled with efforts at the Silver C duration, all failures, many flights not being over half an hour. Time before the Nationals was getting desperately short, and the rules published in SOARING said you had to have a Silver C to qualify. Then new rules came out from TSA requiring only Silver C distance. I had neither.

On the 22nd of July I had the good fortune to line up a crew for the national meet. They were two boys from Tucson who had come up to soar. Pat and Mike. (Names have been changed to protect the innocent.) Arrangements were made to pick them up in Tucson the next Sun-