

THE 1958 NATIONALS FROM THE COCKPIT OF THE HP-8

by DICK SCHREDER

After losing the HP-7 the day following the 1957 Nationals, the prospect of building another ship seemed to require more effort than was left in my system so I decided to get a Ka-6. This machine was delivered in September and proved to be an excellent sailplane. The HP-7 had spoiled me though and, by November, I was back on the drawing board.

The HP-8 which evolved resembled the HP-7 outwardly, weighed in 80 lbs. heavier, had closer rib spacing, a different airfoil, retractable wheel, hydraulic shock absorber, hydraulic brake, speed limiting dive brakes and simpler assembly details.

At 6 A.M. Tuesday morning, July 22nd, only one week from the start of the '58 Nationals, the HP-8 was assembled for its first test flight and towed to 2000 ft. It handled satisfactorily in the smooth early morning air and upon landing was loaded on its new trailer, the ship and crew heading forthwith toward Bishop, California.

Three days and 2400 miles later, ship and crew arrived without incident at the destination. It was hard to believe that this was sailplane country right in the heart of the ruggedest mountains and most forbidding deserts. My first impression was that at least 50% of the ships would be eliminated by forced landings in this bitterly rough terrain.

Friday and Saturday were spent in a last minute effort at putting and smoothing the roughest spots on the wings. But anyone who has gone through this program knows that a two or three months job can't be done in two days.

On Sunday, we gave up the filling and decided to try flying. On tow the dive brakes were pulled open by air forces and could not be completely retracted. The rest of the day was spent hunting and installing springs.

Monday I got up to 15,000 ft. on a White Mountain thermal but the brakes came out again at 100 miles per hour and terminated the flight. The rest of this day was spent in installing positive stops and two more retracting springs.

On Tuesday, the first day of the contest, a conservative goal and re-

turn flight of 112 miles to Lone Pine California, was selected because of the mediocre weather and inexperience of the pilots. I got away on my first tow but had difficulty finding the right kind of thermals to get up to the top of the White Mountain Range. I just couldn't force the ship into the rocks where the thermals were hiding and still feel safe. Dragging the rugged, rocky walls with a wingtip in rough air was completely different from the Ohio, Texas and Elmira soaring that my previous three years experience had been built over.

At this point, about 2/3 of the way south to Lone Pine and still below the top of the mountains, I disregarded the advice of those experienced in the area and left the mountains for the sunny valley. There was not a single thermal and down I went to land wheel-up on an abandoned highway. Thompson, Hutchinson, Moore and Jensen made the round trip and my flight netted only 386 points, putting me in 11th place. As far as I was concerned, I was out of the contest. The only bright spot was that the brakes were finally working properly and the ship was performing beautifully.

On Wednesday, the second contest day, a flat triangle of 116 miles was named task for the day. The course was parallel to the Whites, up the

valley north to Benton Station, south to Aberdeen and then northward to Bishop. I flew the course in 3 hours and 15 minutes and was feeling pretty proud for making it all the way around until I landed and was advised by my wife that I would have to go around again because Hutch had made it in 2 hours 55 minutes. It was nearly 4 P.M. when I took off again with some doubt about getting back. A good thermal which whisked me up to 16,000 feet changed the picture completely. I cruised to Benton Station at 120 mph indicated and was able to maintain altitude. I got all the way back to Bishop before finding it necessary to circle for altitude again. Cruising once more at 120 mph seemed effortless for the HP-8. With flaps in the 5° up position the sill line was level and it was impossible to sense any nose down attitude. The many long hours of wintertime construction all seemed worthwhile as this magnificent ship raced along so quietly and so effortlessly. I swung over the valley to Aberdeen, circled and headed back to the mountains where I expected to work for more altitude. As time went by it became apparent that the ship was losing so little altitude that the glide could be stretched all the way home to Bishop. Before long I was up to 130 and cracking the dive brakes in order to get down. Upon landing I was welcomed by getting 2 hours and 15 minutes, the best time of the day, good for 1000 points; total 1386. I moved from 11th place to 6th place. Average speed was 53.4 mph.

On Thursday, the weather conditions looked excellent so the contest

The author, current National Soaring Champion, just after landing at Bishop from the El Mirage and return flight, talks it over with his family crew and Lloyd Licher.

Photo: Tom Henderson

