

# TEXAS GYPSY TOUR

by R. TERRY WHITE

When a seven-day regional soaring contest with a four-day "Gypsy Tour" to points in West Texas was proposed to the membership of Texas Soaring Association, the idea sounded like a good one.

Planning began in the early summer for the 1958 Texas and Southwestern Soaring Contest set for August 25 to 31.

Early indications were that there would be anywhere from six to eight sailplanes entered, but when the starting day arrived, only three contestants were on hand for the trek airward to West Texas—Pat Mulloy, 1-23; Al Backstrom, Pratt-Read, and Terry White, Minimoa.

Those not entering gave their rea-

Weatherford airport, about the half-way mark.

The second day's task was a 104 mile goal flight west to Sweetwater from Ranger. A stiff southwesterly wind and nothing better than zero sink in several starts for the Minimoa and the Pratt-Read made it seem more practical to go the land route.

The Pratt-Read was aero-towed to Sweetwater while Mulloy and White trailered to the goal.

That night, everyone elected to stay at a motel in Sweetwater which had a swimming pool. Leaving the pool long enough to eat, the glider-guiders chomped down on the best buy in steaks east of the Pecos —



Photo: R. Terry White

Gypsies at Ranger, Texas; Mulloy's Schweizer 1-23, the gull-winged Minimoa and the Pratt-Read.

sons variously as "no open days scheduled," or "no cash prizes offered." Evidently, a new generation of professional soaring pilots has arisen.

A few pilots elected to go it alone and optimistically, in view of the poor-by-Texas-standards soaring season, declared that they were going Diamond digging since no cash was offered, while others made the Gypsy Tour. None of them made 310 miles, and usually stumbled over the Red River and hit the ground with a dull thud in Oklahoma.

Meanwhile, back at the contest the first day's task was a timed flight 98 miles west from Grand Prairie to Ranger.

Conditions were rather puny and no cumulus formed during the day. Terry White and Minimoa made the goal in 3:22 for 1000 points. Mulloy landed near Strawn, 15 miles short of the goal, and Backstrom landed at

15 oz. filet with all trimmings, \$2.

Aiming their sailplanes east the next morning, and with the southwest wind at their backs, the contestants took off for the return to Ranger.

Mulloy got away on the first launch, as did Backstrom. On the third launch, White managed to get away from the airport and landed ten miles out on Highway 80, just beyond the Sweetwater city limits.

Backstrom landed just short of Abilene, 30 miles out of Sweetwater, and the man from Mississippi rode his red-and-white 1-23 all the way back to Ranger for the 1000 points.

Mulloy again was the only one to make the last leg of the tour, Ranger to Grand Prairie. Backstrom landed east of Weatherford, 58 miles out, and White made a fence-skimming, downwind landing on Weatherford airport.

The first day back at home base

was the old reliable 78 mile triangle, Grand Prairie-Russell Field-Waxahatchie-Grand Prairie. Once more, the Mississippi Flash showed the youngsters how it was done by driving around the course. Backstrom landed five miles out and was aero-retrieved. White, on two starts, never got away from the field.

The next day was solid overcast. Everyone sat around staring at the sky and bulling, but never got off the ground. No one ever learned whether or not there were 1500 fpm thermals under the overcast.

On the last day, Mulloy packed up his sailplane and 3850 points in preparation for heading home and did not fly.

Task for the day was again the 78 mile triangle.

Snuffy Smith of Tulsa arrived for the Labor Day weekend with his L-K and took part in the contest. He was the only one to complete the triangle.

Backstrom made the first turn-point and landed at Brittain, 20 miles. White fell short of the first turn point and landed at Kennedale, 11 miles out.

White, in second place up to the last day, fell behind Backstrom by 15 points in the tally. Mulloy had a total of 3850, Backstrom 2000, White 1985 and Smith 1000.

At an awards dinner in the Carsey's spacious hack yard, Mulloy was named Southwestern Champion and received the Silvaire Trophy to carry back to Mississippi and polish for a year.

The title of Texas champion went to Al Backstrom who received the Stratoflex Trophy.

A total of 21 people made the Gypsy Tour portion of the contest by land and by air. Marion Griffith virtually became a fitting of the Waco towplane, and was relieved on the last day by Pete Peterson.

Crewing for Pat Mulloy were Helen Mulloy and the four Mulloy youngsters. Charles Ashworth and Richard Carter crewed for Al Backstrom, (each alternating as passenger) and Oats Schwarzenberger crewed for the Minimoa.

Handling the statistics, timing and beer were Wally and June Wiberg. Wally acted as contest director as well as initially writing the rules.

When the last wing was loaded, it was agreed that although the group participating in the contest was small, they all had great fun making like gypsies across West Texas. The go-it-aloners don't know what they missed.