

# FIRST ANNUAL ROCKY MOUNTAIN SOARING CONTEST

by WILLIAM E. SMULL

As the 1958 Labor Day weekend approached, last-minute preparations were being made for the Rocky Mountain Soaring Contest at East Colfax Airpark near Denver. Members of the Denver Soaring Club, sponsoring the meet, were collecting towropes, preparing contest forms, readying the club TG-3, and keeping a hopeful eye on the weather. Merv Hicks, the club instructor, contest chairman and SSA State Governor for Colorado, was working hard at getting Tim Lucero's flattop L-K licensed in time for the meet. With the help of some of the club members, he made it.

Take-offs began at 12:30 and by mid-afternoon the ships were well distributed at landing points between East Colfax Airpark and the day's goal, Deertrail, Colorado. Jim Klein landed his Skylark near Deertrail for a distance of 32 miles and top points for the day. Second best distance was Dave Johnson's 29 miles. Ed Smull, in the Denver Soaring Club's TG-3, wasn't able to find that second thermal and completed his first "cross-country" flight 6 miles from home for the day's shortest flight.

Returning pilots found another TG-3 being assembled at East Colfax

Ed Smull spent 2½ hours at hard labor in getting the club TG-3 to Deertrail, then landed to qualify for his Silver C distance leg. Merv Hicks and Dave Johnson ran out of air 25 and 18 miles, respectively, from the starting point.

Monday dawned clear and warm. The Weather Bureau predicted westerly winds and a very favorable stability index, and it was apparent that outstanding soaring conditions were going to prevail. Although the weather indicated that this should be an open day, the pilots voted to avoid long retrieves in the Labor Day traffic by making it a task day. The longest task on the Contest Committee's list was "only" 200 kilometers, and something more ambitious was obviously indicated. A new triangular course was hurriedly mapped out as dust devils began to march in steady succession across nearby plowed fields. Today's task was going to be a big one: from East Colfax to Boulder, then to Colorado Springs and return — 193 miles.

First to be on his way was Merv Hicks. He found it easy going on the trip to Boulder, then headed into the mountains for the next leg to Colorado Springs. Flying at about 16,000 feet, he was able to cover nearly 50 miles before finding it necessary to circle in a thermal! Tourists atop Pike's Peak were treated to the sight of a sailplane soaring gracefully overhead as Merv headed toward the second turning point.

Meanwhile, two other sailplanes were rapidly catching up to Merv and the L-K. Jim Klein also chose to go through the mountains between Boulder and Colorado Springs, and was pushing the Skylark along at better than 100 mph between thermals. And only the best thermals rated a visit by Jim. His rule for today was, "If it doesn't give 800 fpm within the first circle, look for a better one!" Joe Irvine, having taken his 1-23G as high as 21,500 feet over the mountains, dropped down to look for the turning point marker and joined the L-K and the Skylark near Colorado Springs. After the 3 ships made the turn, Merv Hicks elected to head back for the mountains for part of the last leg. The stiff west wind made this a slow process, and he was finally forced to land north of Colorado Springs, at Dave Johnson's private field! Distance, 135 miles. Irvine and Klein headed straight for home, and arrived at East Colfax less than a minute apart. However, Klein had



Photo: Tim Lucero

Betty Klein helps husband Jim prepare for take-off in his Skylark III.

Saturday morning saw five sailplanes at the field ready to fly: Jim Klein's Skylark III, Joe Irvine's 1-23G, Tim Lucero's flattop L-K (flown by Merv Hicks), Dave Johnson's flattop L-K, and the Denver Soaring Club's TG-3. With the arrival of Dave Johnson and his Super Cub towplane, all was in readiness. A pilot's meeting was called, where the scoring system, take-off and towing procedures and contest forms were explained. Then the pilots chose the day's task from a prepared list. Weather conditions weren't very promising, so a modest 66 mile goal-and-return course was chosen.

Airpark. Nate Eastman had arrived from Kimball, Nebraska, and was getting ready to join in the fun.

Sunday's weather appeared to be an improvement over that of the previous day. The pilots again chose to try the Deertrail-and-return course, this time with more hope for success. Cumulus clouds began to appear south of the course as the Super Cub towed off the first of six optimistic pilots. Jim Klein found soaring conditions good enough to complete the trip in his Skylark at an average speed of 30.2 mph. Joe Irvine made it around with a 27.1 mph average in the 1-23G.