

# GUS RASPET— STUDENT OF FLIGHT

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How does one, in a few short pages, go about recording the personality, genius, dreams and accomplishments of one of the most unique men of our times? All of us who have attempted the task are overcome by our inability to put our personal recollections and feelings down in written form. Fortunately, little will be lost by our failure since the life work of Dr. August Raspet is well recorded in the many fascinating papers he has published, and his personality is deeply etched in the memories of a multitude of people both here and abroad who were privileged by knowing him either directly or through correspondence. No one who came in contact with him could re-

gard him casually. People either enthusiastically admired and championed his cause or outspokenly criticized and opposed him. Gus never complained about opposition or criticism. He was basically an ardent student of atmospheric flight, and knew that if he persisted until he understood the laws of nature his views would be proven and accepted. The courage and tenacity with which he tackled difficult and pioneering problems in the face of almost overwhelming opposition were a wonder to behold.

Gus's passion for efficient flight through the atmosphere amounted to almost a mania. One of the subjects closest to his heart was flight in

The late Gus Raspet in the back seat of a TG-3A sailplane demonstrating the stethoscope and tubular probe (extending through the fuselage side) used to listen for boundary layer changes on the wing of the sailplane.



nature. He always felt there were secrets locked up in that realm which could be useful to human flight. One cannot help but feel that a man of his philosophy and dedication should have had the privilege of working in those wonderful days at the turn of the century when man was so close and yet so far from mastering flight. In the book *Feathered Wings*, Anthony Jack describes what were no doubt kindred souls in these words: "Those early books on bird flight were written by men wholly siezed of the passion for flight; there is an enthusiasm, a madness, a brotherhood about some of them that belong to the airmen and not to the ornithologists." He quotes from Mouillard (1881) "If there be one domineering, tyrant thought, it is the conception that the problem of flight may be solved by man. When once this idea has invaded the brain it possesses it exclusively. It is then a haunting thought, a waking nightmare, impossible to cast off." Gus found himself in a world where the basic problem of human flight was already solved—as a matter of fact so well solved that men had not only discounted flight in nature as so far removed from the realm of human flight as to be academic, but had even convinced themselves that subsonic flight was well enough understood that no basic breakthroughs were likely. Gus had a contagious optimism that we yet had much to learn and apply to the problems of flight. He not only wrote visionary accounts of what could be, but went about in a most inspired and practical manner to prove the point.

His range of interest encompassed the entire flight spectrum. At the lower end was his interesting work with the *Zanonia* seed. Lippisch had written of the influence of this seed in early aircraft development in Germany. Gus obtained some from Celon and determined the gliding performance of these miniature flying wings with stop watch and tape measure. He then made changes in trailing edge reflex to assure himself that nature had trimmed them to their optimum lift coefficient. We kidded him by asking whether he would by selective breeding develop a man-carrying one.

Next on the scale came the model airplane work. In this realm are found examples of his wholehearted assistance to young people and the remarkable way in which he encouraged others to delve deeply into their pet projects. His son David