

SOARING WEEKEND AT DRY LAKE No. 3

by EUGENE V. MARTZ

As a relative newcomer to the art of soaring, I was all ears when the oldtimers around Hummingbird Haven, home base for the Northern California Soaring Association at Livermore, swapped tales about soaring weekends. Of course, the pros and cons of many sites were discussed. Good soaring at some, not so good at others. Some too hot, some too dusty, and others just too far away. I soon noticed that the Reno-Minden, Nevada area was mentioned frequently, and always evoked fond recollections and favorable comment from most of the members.

I heard how from auto tow, one could make spectacular gains in altitude, fly for hours in terrific thermals, and on good days experience the crowning thrill of flying the Sierra wave. To many, it also meant escape from the congestion of the city, for after a night drive over the Sierras, one found himself amid the completely different and beautiful world of the desert . . . a refreshing change.

The more I listened, the more the idea of a soaring weekend in the desert captivated me, and I hoped someone would organize a trip. However, the summer was speeding by, soaring was good at Livermore, and it looked as if we wouldn't make a trip this year. Finally, good news came. Ed Blalock and the Reno Club were hosting a Labor Day Soaring

Weekend at their new site on Dry Lake #3, north of Reno, and had invited clubs in the area to come up.

This was the opportunity I had hoped for, but some complications arose. First of all, no one in our group had ever flown from the lake, and there was some hesitancy toward making a long trip to an unknown site. I heard accounts of how miserable dry lake flying could be - hot, dusty, and especially rough on families tending the camp while the glider guiders were up having fun. Also, it seemed that no one in the Ames Club, of which I am a member, had a car in shape to tow our TG-3A over the mountains. It looked as if the outing might die a-borning. Surmounting an old army-taught hesitancy, I volunteered to tow the club's TG-3A over the mountains, and a group of eight decided to make the trip. I'm glad we did, for the weekend proved to be everything I hoped it would be . . . and more.

We picked up the sailplanes, which we had loaded on trailers the weekend before, at five Saturday morning and started on the 250 mile journey. Bob Gomes led our two-sailplane convoy, towing his own ship, a 1-26 named "I-Soar" because it still sports its original zinc chromate finish. After a breakfast stop at Manteca, and numerous questions about the strange craft we were towing, we pressed on to Reno. This

was my first try at pulling a TG-3A trailer, and with two rather bald tires I was more than a little concerned. We arrived at Donner Summit about noon and stopped to document the crossing with photographs. After more inquisitive glances from passing motorists, we began the descent to Reno.

At Reno we left Highway 40, and swung north on 395. About thirteen miles north of the city we caught our first glimpse of Dry Lake #3, lying in a basin surrounded by low hills. The highway dropped down and closely paralleled the lake for its entire length. The entrance was on the north end and we had to cross the full length of the lake to reach the sailplanes, which were being flown from the south end. We were impressed by its size and complete flatness.

As we approached the camp we could see four ships already on the flight line; Ed Blalock's new Nimbus, the Reno Club's TG-3A and recently acquired L-K, and the Sacramento Club's beautifully restored TG-3A. A small colony of tents also had sprung up around the Blalock's house trailer, which was to serve as an oasis and origin of some mighty fine food during the three-day stint.

The lake, which is 5,000 feet above sea level, is roughly two and a half miles long, north and south, and about one and three-fourths miles wide. It is bounded for half its length on the east by a ridge which continues south beyond the lake. The ridge rises abruptly to about 900 feet at the southeast corner of the lake, and diminishes in height as it runs north. Another higher ridge runs east-northeast and joins the lake at the northeast corner. To the west, elevation increases more gradually until the first foothills of the Sierras rise about three miles from the lake.

As this was only the second season the Reno Club had been flying off the lake, they were still busy exploring its possibilities. They were able to give us a pretty good idea of what to expect under given conditions. They had found that the ridge afforded good lift almost every day because of its relation to the prevailing winds. With a 20 mph wind out of the west or northwest, which is common in the area, one could auto tow to 1500 feet, make a fast down-wind run and get to the ridge with about 1,000 feet. Once on the ridge he could work it almost in its entirety if the wind was right, or confine his pattern to one of the

View of Dry Lake No. 3 from the ridge looking west, with Bob Gomes in the 1-26 preparing to land near the cars and ships at the edge of the lake.

Photo: Eugene V. Martz

