

WHAT A DAY!

by WILSON BARNES

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I awoke in a panic, certain that I'd overslept, but the clock showed only 2:30 A.M. The alarm was set for 3:30. Frank Slavens was scheduled to be over at 4:00 to help me finish getting the Pterodactyl ready for the road. The dawn was to bring a big day; the SCSA meeting of the night before had kept us up until midnight, and here I was, as excited as a kid before Christmas, waking up in the middle of the night.

I had gotten the ship, the Schweizer 1-7, from Lloyd Licher some six months before when he'd moved up to a 1-26. A trailer wasn't included in the deal, so I'd spent the intervening time getting soloed in the SCSA Flight Group's 2-22, accumulating nine solo flights, and building a trailer for "Terry." The last week had been a frenzy of activity: wiring, lights, a trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles for the tag, and countless other details. At last the great day had arrived, and my "beautiful bird"* would take to the air again, some 22 years after her maiden flight.

At last the alarm signalled permission to get up. Frank and his son, Kirk, arrived on schedule. I pulled a somewhat less than enthusiastic Shirley out of bed and we were on our way. Half of the ship, it seemed, was in the car with Shirley and me, the rudder, struts, gap cover, and miscellaneous hardware, none of which could yet be carried on the not-quite-finished trailer. But with Frank following in his truck, we were off to El Mirage, hoping that nothing vital had been left behind.

We arrived just in time to descend with the rest of the Flight Group on Anne Briegleb for coffee, taking up every seat around the counter in the lunch room. Then (at last!) out of the dry lake, where there were now two ships to assemble, the 2-22 and her smaller predecessor, the 1-7. Although I'd never assembled Terry before, there were no problems, for her joints differed little from the familiar 2-22.

Before long, Lloyd arrived. After checking Terry over carefully, the moment was at hand! Nervous and excited, I put on chute, helmet, and goggles, and to the accompaniment

*Soaring, July, 1939, page 15.

Wife Shirley (WAG-RXH) looks on as the author, in the cockpit of the Schweizer 1-7, is given final instructions by Lloyd Licher, just prior to Wilson's checkout flights.

Photo by Frank Slavens



of a chorus of bright and witty comments from members of the Flight Group, proceeded to attempt to insert my lean, 6-ft., 1 in. frame into the cockpit. I had never gotten in with the wings on the ship, or while wearing a chute, and it took a few minutes to master the technique. First you step in with your left foot, then sit down, ducking back under the wing; then you raise your right foot, grab it with both hands, and pull it over in front of the instrument panel. No chance of exceeding the weight limitation with this ship, the cockpit isn't large enough!

First we were to try some low tows down the lake with about 200 feet of wire behind Paul Sepulveda's car, so that I could get the feel of the ship. "Spuvie" drove off to the other end of the wire; we hooked up our end, tested the release, hooked up again, and rocked the wings to signal "Take up slack!" The wire jerked and slid across the lake bed, coming taut; I held the stick back in a sweating right hand, my left hand down near the unfamiliar release knob position. The wire pulled tight, the wings were held level, and we're off!

Down the lake we go, at five or ten feet, just above the cloud of dust from the car. Wow! She's as light as a feather, and I overcontrol violently, using muscles developed in the 2-22. Terry is anxious to fly, after those months in the dusty garage. I release, pull the knob again to make sure, and land straight ahead. Lloyd and Shirley pull up beside the ship, and I guess all they can see of me is a pair of goggles and a big grin.

After several more tows with the short wire, higher each time, we're

ready for the 2,000 foot wire and a pattern. Finally we're off in earnest, easing the nose up, keeping an eye on the ASI, watching the long hand on the altimeter as it steadily clocks around. A good tow. Spuvie, steady at 45 mph. At 1500 feet we level off and release, and relax for a moment, enjoying the wonderful quiet isolation. The wind swishes by the sides of my head and the desert is beautiful in the sunlight.

Terry flies like a dream. She makes a P-R feel like a 2-22. Turn to the left? Just ease the left wing down with light pressure on the stick, and she rolls over effortlessly, the nose coming around easily and precisely. Then a turn to the right and into the pattern: turbulence at 400 feet on the downwind leg; I marvel at the variometer which sits perfectly steady, thanks to its total energy venturi. Now crosswind, inside the power lines across the end of the lake, and in to land beside the 2-22. Excited and very, very happy, I extricate myself from the cockpit and try to tell those on the ground how it was.

A little later Bob Archer towed off in the 2-22, on his fourth solo flight. After release, we saw the 2-22 begin to circle and it was soon apparent that Bob wasn't losing any altitude; if anything, he was going up! Within minutes it was certain that he'd made his "C," the fourth one in the Flight Group. This was no time to be on the ground!

Quickly, we push Terry out; then on with the chute and those crazy goggles, and repeat the contortions that insert one into the cockpit. Just

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