

YOU CAN'T SOAR A 1-19

by JIM HARD

This is the story of a cross-country soaring flight; a Gold Badge distance flight in a Schweizer SGU 1-19.

The story begins in the spring of 1958 in Richland, Washington, and ends on May 11, 1962, the day I flew my 1-19 a distance of 190 miles to a predetermined goal.

In June of 1958 a local flight instructor described to me the thrill of motorless flight during a hangar-flying session. He had experienced one auto tow and frankly admitted it was one of the most exciting events in his flying career. On the basis of what I learned in that conversation, I was determined to find out more about the sport and, a few weeks later, a dinner party was arranged by my wife, Patt, so I could meet with Bob Moore (U.S. Diamond Badge #13) to discuss the subject further.

In addition to answering all my questions on soaring, Bob subsequently taught me how to fly gliders, loaned me soaring equipment which I had not yet acquired, and provided technical advice which helped form the basis for the soaring habits and practices which were to be developed later.

For nearly a year plans were made, soaring books read, glider pilot haunts frequented, soaring meets attended, and lists of sailplanes perused; all in an attempt to get into the game as soon as possible. In January of 1959, Tom Clark (C Badge #1661) of Richland and I formed a partnership and purchased SGU 1-19, Serial #43, from the Toledo, Ohio, Glider Club. It took us three months to make the necessary arrangements to get the ship the 2000-plus miles to its new home but we finally received it intact and

made the first low level auto tow training run in late April.

On May 11, 1959, I gained 200 feet of altitude off a high wire auto tow for my first soaring flight. Five days later my C Badge was earned on a one-hour soaring flight to 3500 feet. On landing from this flight, one of the onlookers commented that "you can't soar a 1-19." They had forgotten to tell me. On the next tow I went back up for another hour and 5300 feet which proves that the Vista Field thermals are reliable indeed. I dashed home to build a barograph.

Two weeks later, on the first day of the Columbia Basin Soaring Association's Memorial Day Meet, I stayed aloft for 5:18 and reached 9200 feet to claim Silver altitude gain and my five hours duration. Although several Silver distance flights were made in the succeeding three months, recognition was not received until I flew straight out 36 miles on August 30th and landed well within the speed limit on a little-used macadam highway. On this flight and on several others, Rudy Allemann acted as crew chief. I feel indebted to Rudy for his help and also because he was, and still is, a strong inspiration to me. This inspiration has induced me to go out and attempt soaring flights which I would otherwise not try. I trust this will not come as much of a surprise to him since it is no secret that I consider his soaring abilities as ranking among the best.

During the summer of 1960, two "vulgar downwind dashes" were made; one of about 125 miles and another of about 115 miles. Although it could be shown with pencil, paper,

and a smoking slipstick that a 300-km. flight was easily within the range of a 1-19 on a super soaring day, the fact that such a flight might be within my abilities did not really sink in until these two cross-country flights were made in 1960. From that time until I reached my goal in May of 1962, all reasonable (and sometimes unreasonable) attempts were made to reach Sandpoint, Idaho, 190 miles northeast of Vista Field, Kennewick, Washington.

During the summer of the next year, 1961, four such attempts were made, resulting in flights of 70, 100, 120, and 75 miles, respectively. Although the goal had come no closer, the year was a partial success in that my Gold altitude gain was earned in the 1-19 at Wenatchee on July 4th in a thermal soaring flight to 13,700 feet.

The 1962 soaring season began in mid-February but the weather did not justify cross-country attempts until the end of April. On April 29th, the 1-19 scratched and fought its way 54 miles before being rained out. On this same day Rudy Allemann landed in a duckpond at Colfax and Ed McClanahan in a potato field near Eltopia, both on attempts at Diamond distance with dog-leg flights. I owe much to Ed for his endless encouragement and for the many times he helped me get into the air and aided on retrieves. Without such friends as he, Paul Pallmer, the others mentioned previously, all of those not mentioned, and my wife, Patt, my soaring activities would have been restricted severely.

On Tuesday, May 8, 1962, a surface low pressure system drifted across Eastern Washington. The skies cleared adequately on Wednesday for cumulus to form and the day was judged to be a five-hour soaring day although still very cool and moist. Thursday was warmer and looked nearly ideal for soaring with a sky full of cumulus all day. A check with the weatherman Thursday night revealed a prediction of more convective activity on Friday, partly because of a low pressure center aloft over the Seattle area which promised to continue pumping the moist, unstable air into Eastern Washington.

Friday, May 11th, began just as predicted; a clear sky with light southwesterly winds. This had to be the day! My weather radio reported cumulus activity at Ephrata, 70 miles to the north, at 0800 PDT. The first local cu appeared over nearby



It's a family sport. Here's Jim's crew, Steve, Patt and Amy, after preparing the 1-19 for flight at Vista Field.

Photo by
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