

# 397 KILOMETERS IN THE FAUVEL WING

by JACK LAMBIE

The heated air danced and rippled across Mirage Dry Lake as I sat under the wing of the Fauvel, flashing my signal mirror toward tow planes far away at the El Mirage airport. It was now 1:30 P.M. I had taken off earlier, at noon, to attempt a 310-mile Diamond distance flight and struggled in weak lift for almost an hour, never higher than 3,000 ft. I had flown away from the field toward Las Vegas but found no thermals and just managed to sneak back to the eastern edge of the Dry Lake. I watched Jim Meckoll and Lynn Christensen circle higher and higher in their L-K's and leave for Dry Lake, Nevada. Oh well, I guess I can try tomorrow on July 16th.

Almost an hour since landing had passed by when, with a flash of red and a roar that only a T-6 can make, Chuck Moore zoomed by. An incredible coincidence that Chuck had just happened to fly to El Mirage that day and buzz the Dry Lake on the way! Although he flies for pleasure, his 600 HP airplane has a towhook! I gave him exaggerated hand signals begging for a tow so he landed. We decided to fly back to the airport for the towline.

Just then my fine crew, Bob Johnson and Mike Lambie, came steaming down the lake bed. Lynn Christensen had seen me down as he left for Ne-

vada, and had radioed his crew chief, Tom Stoops, who then informed my crew that I was down on the lake bed. We hooked up the tow line, put the ship on the take-off dolly, taped in and I was ready to go. As we started rolling, however, a gust of wind lifted the ship, dropped it back on the lake bed, and the rope broke. More minutes of sitting in solar radiation under the tightly closed canopy while they tied the rope and repositioned the take-off dolly.

Then my luck began to change. After an exhilarating T-6 tow to 1,000 feet over El Mirage Field, I released in a 600 FPM thermal. At 11,000 feet I tilted the wing down and at 80 miles per hour, swished to the cement plant just north of Victorville where the smoke seemed to have found a thermal.

I was angry and frustrated over the late start. As I rolled into the smoke over the cement plant, an F-106 sailed by in a steep turn and dropped his wheels to land at George Air Force Base, a very heavy-looking, but fast, tailless design. The smoke-marked thermal was big, smooth and strong.

The push of the thermal, the steady winding of the altimeter, the smooth sweep of the desert and mountains past the canopy as I circled in the sunshiny air — wow!

Who cares if it's 2:20 P.M. Let's go!

Leaving the thermal at 14,000 feet, I noticed to the north hazy air ending at about 10,000 feet, a definite indication of an inversion. To the south the air was clearer and dotted with small cumulus spreading from the San Bernardino Mountains. I tried to stay on the edge between the hazy air toward Barstow, Daggett and Baker and the clear cumulus dotted mass to the south. This appeared to be a typical convergence shearline marked by the usual line of wispy curling clouds. I decided not to follow the road to Las Vegas but stick to my shearline and head straight across the desert. I determined to push as hard as I could to catch up with Jim Meckoll and Lynn Christensen. I also soberly decided I must cover at least 50 miles per hour to make 310 miles before sunset at 8:00 P.M. By flying along the shearline, and refusing to work only but finest lift, I was well past Daggett by 3:00 P.M.

In my overexuberance I got down to 3,000 feet over the desert somewhere north of Ludlow and wasted thirty minutes working a couple of weak thermals until I bounced into a good one and went back to 15,000 ASL. I stayed over 14,000 ASL cruising along the shearline at high speed for the next 20 minutes until a "gulf" in the line appeared to veer too far south and I made the mistake of attempting to cut across the clear area.

Down we came. Now in the middle of the clear area I was past the point of no return. The shearline curved north on the other side of a high jagged range of mountains — the New York Mountains, I believe. Much later I crept across this range and back under the little clouds again. Where's that lift? Only a few thousand feet off the ground and I have a good look at the brilliant and lonely desert below. No houses or people as far as I can see in all directions.

It was during this period that I discovered I did not know where I was. That is, I thought I knew my location until I worked my way back up to 14,000 near the Colorado River and couldn't see anything but the lower end of Lake Mojave far to the north. I was very disappointed to see that I had flown almost to Needles before turning north, but continued along the shearline as it curved north towards Las Vegas and managed to stay between 10,000 and

Map showing path of Jack Lambie's flight to Mesquite, Nevada.

