

# GOING FOR DISTANCE

by DICK SCHREDER

Dick Johnson's 535.169-mile world soaring distance record set on August 5, 1951, has proven to be more difficult to break than the sound barrier.

Whenever soaring pilots get together, the conversation usually gets around to a discussion of the best way to go farther.

It seems appropriate therefore, to explore the thinking of our most capable pilots and pool their ideas on the subject. I have written to about 20, requesting their expressions for publication in *Soaring*. If you have any thoughts on the matter, please address them to me at 1150 Nebraska Avenue, Toledo 7, Ohio.

I have toyed with a few wild ideas of my own on how to become a charter member of the 1000 kilometer club, but mine are pretty tame when compared to some that have come in. All of the responses to date have been extremely interesting.

As many replies will be printed each month as space limitations permit.

## Kit Drew's Comments

Harold Jensen, among others of us here in the Middle West, thinks a record distance could be made in the spring. We usually get several days when conditions following a cold front result in a northwest wind of 30 to 40 m.p.h. and strong thermals under cloud streets. It should be possible on one of these days to average 70 to 80 m.p.h. for 7 to 8 hours with a reasonably fast sailplane. The HP-8, of course, would be ideal.

A wave flight is another interesting possibility. I once heard Barney Wiggin advocate a flight down the Appalachians. He recalled a weather pattern which resulted in waves for three days on end. While not as glamorous as the Sierras or Rockies, they appear to have good continuity for sufficient distance and relatively hospitable and populated terrain."

## Bob Moore's Comments

Regarding ways to break the distance record, I am afraid that my two favorite schemes are both due to other people. Also, both call for heroic measures and, since I am no hero, let me out! The first is due to Earl Drew, who graduated in meteor-

ology from Cal Tech and was meteorology officer for the Air Force in Alaska some years ago. He believes that a flight of 700 or 800 miles is easily possible in the summer in Alaska, because the sun shines almost 24 hours a day and the cumulus really build, and even continue through the brief night. Only drawback is that the primitive development of roads means that one would probably lose the sailplane. However, it should be possible to retrieve the barograph and pilot. An expedition to Alaska to break the world distance record should probably plan to take several well-instrumented sailplanes, pilots, airplanes, a helicopter, and a meteorologist who has had much experience there. It would be an expensive and somewhat hazardous undertaking, but perhaps no more so than a major mountain climbing attempt.

The other scheme is to pick just the right day in the spring here in the Northwest and, starting from Richland, Wenatchee, or Yakima, fly (with strong tail wind and good thermals) to Salt Lake City (about 600 miles). Arriving there in the late afternoon, our hero slope soars all night on the Wasatch mountains behind Salt Lake. Next morning, when the thermals start popping, he continues his trip for another several hundred miles! This one was thought up by either Ed Butts or Paul MacCready.

## John Ryan's Comments

I believe that there are two ways to break the record, thermal soaring and wave soaring. Combinations of the two are usually too rare and impossible to forecast to offer much hope for success, though not impossible. I have not really studied the exact route which could be used for a record wave flight but a bit of thought with a relief map such as I have on my wall right in front of me would show a route starting at Bishop and heading ENE toward Denver. I have given the thermal flight a good deal of study and feel that there are three or four possibilities. One is a start around Marfa, Texas, heading north toward Denver. The second is eastward from NW Arizona toward the panhandle. Third

is a route from Kanab, Utah, northward to Butte, Montana. A flight out of Odessa or La Johnson with better conditions and a faster ship would break the record but would not offer much hope of the magic 1000 km. (621.4 mi.) I feel that any record attempt should be geared to this distance and planned for on this basis.

I think that the record would long ago have been broken if anyone had seriously tried. By trying I mean not Sunday attempts at Diamond distance, but seriously planned flights only during the weather situation previously planned as being necessary to complete the flight on paper. Unless this is done and adhered to it will be a blunder of luck if the record is broken. Those aspiring to the record must be prepared to wait for the right day and be ready and rested and all set when it rolls around. If they are flying one of the mountainous routes they must have flown over it beforehand to check the terrain, forested areas and possible landing spots. It is a great help to be able to push on knowing that safe terrain is ahead. Chances may be taken in this case where otherwise they would not be justified.

I do not think that cloud flying should be planned on as being necessary for the flight. If it is there at the right time it can be used, but high-speed cruising under cloud streets and large areas of lift is pretty hard to heat, and the probable delays in clouds plus the loss of performance with the attendant ice are usually not worth the effort.

The aspirant must set up a plan for the flight and if he falls behind that plan he must face facts and not keep pushing. In Arizona I can probably fly 400-plus miles many days, but I have only wear and tear and high costs to show for my efforts. I plan to do a 180 and head back as far as possible to reduce the retrieve when I fall behind my flight plan.

About the only facet of all this that is not available to the average pilot is the availability of time. We can't all live in Kanab or Odessa or Kingman and we must work and meet our family obligations. I can only suggest that the aspirant do some weather research and plan his vacation to cover the most ideal time at the site. Then, he must sit it out and wait, doing local flying to make the trip worthwhile, until the ideal day comes along. If it doesn't come, he must repeat the effort the next year, etc., until it clicks.