

# OFF TO THE RACES

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## (Conclusion)

In France, by mid-May, the time has arrived when 500 km. flights begin to become a possibility; and everyone watches the weather forecasts avidly. From the Paris area the three choices are into Germany, down the Rhone valley, and to the southwest toward Bordeaux. The last two routes are the most often used because of weather and because they allow the flight to be completed without the problems of frontiers. It is generally figured that 500 km. is possible from Paris about two to four days of the year, and for this reason there is great concern on everyone's part to have the chance for time off from work, the use of a ship, and the right day, all at once. The purchase of the Ka-6 had solved one part of the problem for me, but the others still existed. So when the met. began to look promising on Saturday, the 27th of May, there was great excitement at Chavenay. With the next day a Sunday there would be a real scramble for aircraft; and the two private owners on the field, Joe Fitzner and I, felt very smug.

Sunday morning a telephone to the met. office confirmed that the evolution of the weather was as predicted and I quickly ate a good breakfast, hoping that it would be my last chance to eat until late evening. Then off to the airfield arriving at 0900 in order to be in

plenty of time for the normal 1100 to 1130 take-off. While I was en-route from my home to the airfield I noticed that small "Q" were beginning to form, but at first I ascribed this to a localized condition often seen over the Seine river early in the morning. As I came nearer to the field, however, it was apparent that the cumulus was forming unusually early, and I began to be concerned about the possibility of overdevelopment later in the day. When I arrived there at 0900 the first ship from our group was taking off, Salmel in the Weihe. Frantic isn't the word for the action after that. While I was racing around getting barograph ready and shoving the ship out of the hangar, six others took off. I had declared Bordeaux as my goal, 515 km. to the SW and my next concern was that overdevelopment *was* taking place locally; a clamp was moving in and threatening to cross the field. It extended off to the SW nearly along the line of flight but seemed to exist for only about 10 miles. None-the-less this could be enough to ruin things if one couldn't get off ahead of it. On days like this, regardless of the wind, we usually take off directly from in front of the hangar, and this was what we were doing this particular morning. However, just as I was getting bolted in, the towplane pilot landed over on the runway and towed off the first

of the ships which were waiting for local flying.

This was quite a shock, and Colonel "Phil" Seneff, who was helping me get ready, raced over to find out what was the trouble. The answer was that it was no longer possible to get away due to the weather, but since I had my own ship, and if I was so foolish as to try anyway, OK, they'd come back and give me a tow. So, at 10 o'clock I released under the edge of the clag and found enough lift still to climb to 900 meters, the base, and shove off. Remaining slightly left of course for the first few miles to avoid the local "Perturbation," as the French call such a phenomenon, and continually adjusting the valve on my new total energy vario, I found myself only 50 km. out after 51 minutes. Pretty darn slow; 500 takes about 8½ hours at this rate I figured. But now the sky was well-covered with beautiful "Q" again and I decided to leave the vario alone. It was indicating up and down anyway and that's all a fellow should really need in this kind of weather. Ceilings went up to 1500 meters with just the right coverage of cloud, not building too high, either. Looks perfect.

It is perfect! The next 50 km. only takes 45 minutes and the next 50 takes 35. That works out at 54 miles an hour, about as good as I could hope to do. The wind has veered in behind me now and I figure it contributes about 15 miles an hour.

Chartes, Chateaudun, Blois and the Loire River are all behind now. The weather stays good and the speed stays high. Chattellerrault and Poitier are passed. I reach the 300-km. line at 2:10 P.M. and remember how hard the 300 was for Diamond goal. Guess it all depends on what you're trying for. Something is bound to go wrong soon; it's getting too easy. But no, the ceiling is up to 1800 meters now and the lift is still booming. Three meters a second is becoming fairly common and you can practically depend on two anytime.

Now the goal is in sight and it is only five o'clock. Ceiling is up to 2000 meters and lift is still good. I should be able to stay up until at least seven, maybe later. Could I make Biarritz? Oh well, have to go home on the train tonight and go to work tomorrow morning anyway, maybe it would be better to land

Putting the Ka-6 away in the hangar at Bordeaux after the 500-km flight.

