

# OFF TO THE RACES

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Like most sailplane pilots I have been working from the beginning of my soaring toward a Diamond Badge. But as everyone knows, the days which are suitable for 300-kilometer distances and the like don't come very often.

This makes us look around for something equally exciting; and, in my own case, caused me to start competitive flying which I prefer to call "sailplane racing."

The beginning was in 1960 when I was stationed in France and my first race was for the championship of the Isle de France. This was the first time that this particular race was held, and its objective was to furnish good training ground for people like myself who had little or no competition experience. No one was permitted to enter who had more than a Silver Badge, and all the contestants were to fly Nord 2000's, a version of the Olympia. Since I already had one leg on my Gold Badge and would be flying a Fauvette, I was ineligible, but they permitted me to enter "Hors Concours." In order to allow the maximum number of people to find the necessary time off, the contest was held for four days on two consecutive weekends.

On the first Saturday, the weather was very weak, and the task was set as distance on an axis across a strong wind toward Esternay. Only a few pilots found any lift at all, and the best flight of the day was 34 kilometers. Sunday opened with solid overcast and a gentle north wind. The race was set at 105 kilometers downwind to Montargis, for speed. For nearly an hour the problem was just to stay in the air. The ceiling was at about 600 meters, just above the release height of 500, and lift was almost nonexistent. Then, to everyone's surprise, the overcast broke up and went to good "Q" so that the last part of the flight was made in strong lift with base up to 1500 meters. My second place on each of these days averaged to a first overall and I went home quite happy with my first effort. However, the next day was a holiday and the weather was promising so I took off on an attempt to make a 300-km. triangle. By the time I had made the turn to the second

leg, which was into a headwind of about 20 knots, the "Q" were gone. I was now in a peculiar situation in which lift seemed to be literally everywhere at altitude but not strong enough to climb and work upwind. After passing one airfield seven times (four upwind and three down) it became fairly evident that I would not be able to complete the triangle. None-the-less I struggled on, using the occasional weak bubbles that seemed to be pushing up through the overall zero.

Finally, over the forest of Orleans, of all places, I got one good thermal to about 1600 meters and thought at last I might make the second turn. It was not to be; that thermal was the best and the last. I picked a small plowed field in a clearing near a chateau and set up the approach. At the crucial moment I saw the furrows were deeper than I had thought, but with no time for a change of mind I had to continue the landing across them on a slight diagonal. The resulting ground loop took the Fauvette temporarily out of action. It was, however, an interesting way to meet the Dutchess of Estissac, on whose chateau grounds I had landed. She very kindly furnished me with a lawn chair and reading material so I could wait with the ship; and invited me to bring my wife and son in to see the chateau when they arrived with the trailer. The accident was disappointing since I couldn't finish the race on the following week end because of it.

The next chance to go racing came in July of 1960 when my application was accepted for entry in the "8 days of Angers." This is a typical French title following the form of the "24 hours of LeMans," which may be more familiar to most readers. The object of this race is to encourage foreigners to compete with a good number of the better French pilots for a wide variety of cups and prizes. An interesting aspect of the "8 days" is that only closed circuit courses are planned: triangles, and goal-and-returns. The reason for this is to cut down on expenses since the organizers pay for the gasoline used on retrieves, and gas costs about 80¢ a gallon in France. It should be pointed out here, I think, that of all the French pilots participating in this race, only one owned his own ship. All the others were chosen by their clubs and given permission to use a club sailplane, trailer and tow car. Since the average size of the French automobile engine is that of the Dauphine, it is obvious that the clubs must own something a bit more powerful for the towing. Many old American cars are used for this purpose. My own "Club Gaston Caudron," has a Chrysler, as well as a couple of the more powerful pre-war Citroens.

In any event, regardless of the reasons for the closed course approach, I rather favor it. It allows everyone to meet at the clubhouse after the race and talk over the events of the day. This is a point where I find sharp contrast between Europeans and Americans. In Europe these post-mortems are generally along the lines of: "Did you

The author waiting for take-off with his Breguet Fauvette in the "8 Days of Angers," 1960.

