

X-C VIA TEHACHAPI WAVE EXPRESS

by FRED ROBINSON

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It is nearly impossible for me to adequately describe the flight I made on March 22nd. I have many details to supply, but emotions cannot flow through my pen. You shall have to place yourself in the cockpit of 8616R and watch the accelerometer needles jump on tow. Look at the variometer! The sky is alive with lenticular clouds. In the wave and released, the 1-26 becomes very quiet, seemingly motionless while

nature's tremendous forces carry it into the high, thin air.

This day caught me by complete surprise. With an unusual surge of energy, I started cleaning out my garage (rearranging the junk, really). Along about 10 o'clock for the first time that day, I looked at the sky. From then on there was no more lost motion in the garage. A phone call to the weather station, another one to Holiday Soaring School and I was on my way. I

managed to make it to Tehachapi with only one traffic ticket.

My partner, Lyman Beman, and I have a 1-26 equipped with a ninety dollar oxygen system and a pretty good set of instruments. On this flight, she carried Winter and Peravia barographs. I was dressed in three layers of clothing, a wool cap, two hoods, mittens and insulated rubber boots. I would not recommend less protection from the cold.

We were airborne on tow at 1:45 P.M. The tow took us southwest of the airport about 5 miles. It was so turbulent that it got downright uncomfortable. We made contact with the smooth wave lift at 8,000 ft. (All altitude figures will be given as above sea level. Tehachapi is 4,000 ft. high.) Seconds passed and we were at 8,500. I grabbed the release and pulled up and away from the towline. I climbed to 9,500 ft. to make sure I really had the wave, then dived off about 700 ft. to mark the barogram. Heading into the wind, 190° M. and holding about 50 mph gave a steady 600 fpm to 18,000 ft. That was the top of the lift, or more likely, I flew out of it. Drifting eastward down the valley, I picked up another 2,000 ft. At this point, without a crew or a definite goal, I turned directly down wind. Sixteen minutes later I was down to 12,000 ft., near California City.

I picked up a small wave there and worked it for about three minutes for 1,000 ft. of altitude. It seemed to die and I turned down wind again heading directly for Inyokern Airport. Without losing much altitude, I reached my little goal and found another wave. This one gave me 4,000 ft. before it quit.

Pointing my tail feathers into the wind, I started out again. Holding within gliding distance of Highway 6, I flew at airspeeds indicated on the MacCready speed ring to conserve altitude. As we progressed northward, I could see Owens dry Lake being lifted into the sky. It just had to be a wave. Could we reach it? We pressed onward, hoping and praying. We cleared the southern rim of the valley near Owens Lake and headed straight for the northern rim. Now below 8,000 ft. and just too close to the ground, I picked out a landing site near a house by the highway. Wham! Bang! Up-down-up, circling as if in a thermal I worked that

