

THE PERILS OF BRUCE AND MARINA BEEBE

by BRUCE BEEBE

(Editor's note: Periodically there comes upon the scene a new personality who, through his persistence and optimism or whatever, makes those who have had their enthusiasm dulled by time sit up and take notice by his achievements. Such a person is the author, an architect from San Francisco, who purchased a Ka-6 sailplane from Graham Thomson late in 1962. His accounts of various flights made since then make a true soaring saga.)

1st Installment

The following story is the result of two years of renting 1-26's and spending many sleepless nights dreaming of the flights I would make when I got a ship for myself. It was not a spectacular flight but it was the beginning of a fulfillment of a dream to fly my own ship. It certainly expressed to me more than any other flight the beauty to behold while controlling a sailplane. It gave me as much, if not more, personal joy as numerous flights made subsequently.

Downwind Wave Flight

Monday, the day before Christmas, I realized as I was on my way to the office that there was a good possibility of a medium altitude wave (15,000 ft.) over Les Arnold's Sky Sailing Airport in Fremont, California. I rushed back home, phoned weather and told my wife, Marina, to get the kids dressed and ready to go to the airport. Marina, the kids and her VW bus are my retrieve crew. Driving across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco to Sky Sailing Airport I could see the possibilities. With a N to NE wind blowing 15 kts. at 1000' to 40 kts. at 5000' the wave should be there.

I discussed the retrieve with Marina as we drove. I would land at an airport. Rieds Hillview, 15 miles away; Morgan Hill, 30 miles away; Hollister; King City; Paso Robles; Santa Maria—all the way to Gold distance, depending on what I found. It was going to be a pioneer flight as no one had ever left the area while aloft in the wave.

I got the Ka-6 rigged and ready for take-off at 11:15. The tow was a slow climb and then turbulence—released in lift at 3500' that pegged the PZL 1000-fpm variometer. At 5000', out of the area of lift. A search and then 200-300 fpm to 6500'. Moving about, 700-800 fpm to 9000' and then a long, long, slow, slow climb at 50-150 fpm to 12,200'. The highest I had ever been and the most altitude I had ever gained in over 90 hours of total flying time. At 12:15, the electric socks feel good (Sears, \$12.00). Let's go!

Looking at the world I could see from Carmel to Drakes Bay, 120 miles of the California Coast. San Francisco, 30 miles away looked like an architectural model. The Sierras, 150 miles away were clear and snow-capped, a wondrous sight.

I lost 2000' going 15 miles with a 50-kt. tailwind, then contacted another weaker wave over Reids Hillview Airport. A half hour later, 1600' gained to 11,800' and another turn to go downwind. I hit delayed sink (50 fpm) and then 400-down, then 75-down, then 300-down. The amplitude slowly died out until I got normal sink. Morgan Hill Airport was 10,000' below and I kept going toward Hollister Airport. At 8000', Hollister Airport in sight. How far to King City? Another 35 miles beyond Hollister. No more waves in this area. Let's head east, over the mountains and see what happens. This is supposed to be an experimental flight. Normal sink in a cross-wind to 6000'. Let's turn back toward Hollister and land. We have to be back at the in-law's house for Christmas Eve dinner. The last time I got to Hollister Airport, I didn't land there. I landed just north of the fence in a field flying a 1-26 on a thermal X-C. Let's make sure we get the airport this time. 5000', over it. Think you can make it? Nose down to 90 kts., dive brakes out, 60 kts., nose steeper to 80 kts., level off at 1000', downwind, cross, land, roll over to the parking apron, stop. 2½ hours. I felt good. The first X-C in my newly-acquired Ka-6 that I had spent about 12 hours in so far.

I phoned Sky Sailing Airport. Marina and brood, and Charlie Fiedler, came to get me. We got back to Les Arnold's and put the bird in the hangar. I phoned my mother-in-law—we will be late—I was blown in my glider by the terrific wind to

FLY WITH THE FLYING GEHRLEINS

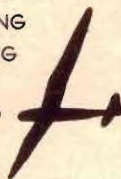
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