

5 HOURS FROM SUN VALLEY

by ROSE MARIE LICHER

July 24th, the third contest day of the Pacific Northwest Regional Soaring Championships at Hailey Airport near Sun Valley, Idaho, was a free distance day for both classes. There were four pilots in Class II using medium-performance sailplanes and at least two of us were flying our first contest. We had been given shorter tasks than the 17 "pros" in Class I the first two contest days, but unfortunately none of us had been able to complete them. Nevertheless, we were enjoying some good-natured rivalry, especially after the opening day when we all landed at the first turn point and so earned 1000 points apiece.

The weather had not been too good and the forecast for this day was not particularly favorable either. There would be scattered cumulus over the mountains with bases at 14,000 feet; the stability index was to be plus 7, even more stable than the day before. Winds were 10 knots from 250° at 7000', 20 knots from 190° at 10,000', 28 knots from 190° at 12,000', 40 knots from 210° at 15,000' and 60 knots from 210° at 20,000'. There was a stationary front to the east running south from Great Falls to eastern Idaho with thunderstorms along the front.

A northerly course seemed to be indicated. However, much of the discussion at the pilots' meeting centered on the inhospitable terrain to the north, including a

twenty-mile stretch near Challis where there were no suitable landing spots. Because of the terrain, my lack of experience in mountain flying, and the unencouraging weather forecast, I decided to head east from Hailey Airport along the southern edge of the mountains in my Schweizer 1-26 sailplane. There were several small airports in that direction including the one at Howe some 70 miles away that had been a turning point for Class I the first contest day. I chose a take-off time of 12:04 and then went to help my crew prepare the ship.

"Crew" consisted of my husband, Lloyd, and our two sons, Max (age 7½) and Bruce (5). We had come to Sun Valley for our vacation and had brought golf clubs, swim suits and hiking shoes as well as the sailplane. Not expecting to go much farther than Howe, I was anticipating some exploration or golf on the rest day following this free distance task.

Having come to Sun Valley lacking the five-hour duration leg for my Silver badge, each day the barograph was carefully smoked, sealed and installed in the 1-26. On this morning while I prepared the barograph, Lloyd and Al Wilson (who had volunteered his assistance) washed down the sailplane wings. This was necessary since on the previous day I had landed in a cow pasture, covering the wings with greenery. Time was running out as I began thumbing through

the maps looking for the ones I needed. "Oh, take them all," Lloyd said, so I did even though I had no expectation of needing them.

Take-off was at 12:07 behind a Super Cub and five minutes later I was waved off at 7600 feet on the ridge three miles southeast of the airport. Slowly I worked my way up to nearly 12,000 feet. Having never flown a sailplane over mountainous terrain before, I must admit to being afraid to venture away from the safety of the now-familiar valley in which Hailey Airport and Sun Valley lie. Finally I headed toward Flat Top Airport, a small mountain strip 20 miles east of Hailey but apprehension must have unconsciously influenced my flying for I flew right down the middle of the valley looking for Flat Top. But there was no lift and suddenly I realized that I should have stayed to the north along the mountains. Was the flight to end so soon just one hop from home base? Finally I ran into weak lift and began to circle 'round and 'round muttering to myself the two pieces of advice given me by the "experts"—"Get high and stay high!" and "Keep to the high ground!" Fortunately the southwest wind came to my assistance by drifting the 1-26 toward the hills where soon I was high enough to see Antelope Valley Airport over the next ridge. To the north there was mountain after mountain and I was glad that I had not gone that way even though cumulus clouds were now forming in that direction. At 1:30 I was circling directly over Antelope Valley Airport at 13,000 feet; 37 miles in 1:18 from release. I certainly wouldn't set any records at that speed but at least I was still in the air with a comfortable margin of altitude.

Now where to go? Ahead was a valley running northwest to Challis and inhospitable terrain; it seemed best to continue northeast across the valley in hopes of finding lift against the mountains. Fortunately there was lift and as the 1-26 circled the accommodating wind carried it over the 10,000-foot mountains to the next valley. Looking south I could see Howe and the airport I had considered as a possible destination. To the north cumulus were forming all along the mountains. I headed for a building cu but encountered only strong down. In disgust I headed north-



The author steps into her Schweizer 1-26 prior to the record flight from Sun Valley.

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