

PIONEERING THE 1000 KILOMETERS

As told by AL PARKER to E. J. REEVES

Somewhere in a certain chapter of a Great Book, it is well said: "To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

And so it must have been on Friday, July 31, 1964. It must, have been indeed, a day to fly. Al Parker thought so. The day dawned much like all mid-summer days in far West Texas, but with perhaps just a little difference. What kind of a day was it? a day like all days except for the little difference that Al Parker discerned.

It is a fact that Parker did not suddenly bestir himself on this summer's morning at the crowing of the cock . . . and suddenly conclude that this might be a day to betake himself to the airport and go 'gung ho' on a huge XC soaring flight.

I suspect that Parker's contrivance of this action might well have had its inception 13 years ago, almost to the day. On August 5, 1951, Richard H. Johnson was launched from this same site to soar 535.169 miles (861.272 km) for a then World's record.

Parker had, in fact, very materially aided and abetted the TSA (Texas Soaring Association) group of ambitious soaring men who had descended upon his town bent upon the business of record breaching. It might well have been, therefore, that this action was in the planning stages lo these 13 years.

But whatever it might have been let's get down to the events of July 31, 1964 when Parker became the first member of his Sagebrush Soaring Society's newly formed "International '622' Club." And what a very exclusive club that is!

Al Parker is, as much as any soaring man I have ever known, ideally the "record type." He is a thinker, listens well, argues not, but calmly and coolly calculates. A true native born and raised West Texan, he is self-effacing and modest to the extreme.

Len Niemi, master sailplane designer and craftsman, should be proud of the magnificent Sisu. As owner-pilots are learning to get ultimate performance from the ship, its real capabilities will come more and more to light. Parker's flight is a case in point.

Photo by S. A. Aldott.

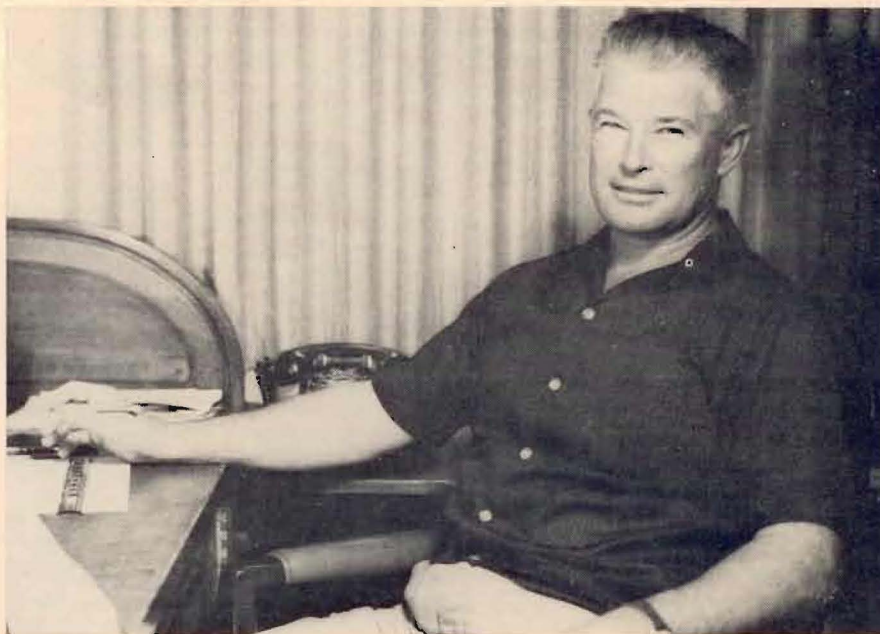


Photo by Ellwood Scott

Not all of Al Parker's time is spent in the cockpit of the Sisu, he is also a business man.

Al's first exposure to soaring flight came as a boy sitting atop a windmill mast on the vast Parker ranch watching the graceful wheeling and soaring flight of the numerous Texas turkey buzzards and hawks. Al says he was the lowest boy on the totem pole at the Parker Ranch. The older brothers pre-empted the horse riding chores and the real cowboy stuff. Young Alvin was relegated as he says, to 'windmill fixing.'

Al has lived all of his life, now age 45, in West Texas, a great deal of it out-of-doors. This is excusing time away from the ranch for college (Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University—B.S. in Animal Husbandry). Additionally a rather extensive tour of World War II military duty included seven months in combat as a tank jockey in an armored division of all things. (man, did that Army ever overlook good pilot material).

The top of a windmill mast is a superb vantage point for observing, studying and understanding nature's exhibit of creatures and elements. Dust devils by the score dancing across the hot plains, blooming at last with a magnificent halo of cumulus cloud. Myriad of

birds, hawks, scissor-tail fly catchers, swallows—all taking advantage of the powerful upcurrents carrying bugs, beetles and all manner of things aloft for the taking. If a lowly grasshopper with his poorly planned aerodynamic shape could join this mirth—why not Alvin?

I reckon Al thought of this. It is certain that similar thoughts ran through his mind on Friday, July 31st for a good solid ten and one half hours.

Al relates this story of his action on July 31, 1964 in his usual calm, direct and frank manner. On looking out of his bedroom window at 6:00 A.M. on that day, he saw what he took to be favorable indications of an early start for a record soaring flight. It looked like a chance to fly the Sisu 1,000 kms. and achieve as he says, "my burning ambition to break the world's distance record," (the wife says addiction, not ambition). Mrs. Parker cooked breakfast while Al dressed; afterwards sent him to his barber for a long overdue haircut. By 8:15 he was on his way to the airport.

Ian Burgin, an Australian, who had just graduated from Abilene Christian College as a Bible stu-