

By Sunday nearly all the 65 contestants had arrived at Stead, and the tie-down area was filled with sailplanes. This offered pilots, crews, and spectators a sort of concours d'elegance where they could be within touching distance of craft bearing such exciting names as Libelle, Diamant, Phoebus, Sisu, Fauvette, Skylark and Austria. By evening old friendships had been renewed and new ones started. With strenuous days ahead some sought last-minute relaxation in Reno's gaudy gambling casinos, taking in the big-name shows, or sampling the cuisine. One such was Richard Schreder who exercised his predilection for Oriental cooking at a Chinese restaurant. At the end of the meal, when the customary fortune cookie was served, he extracted the slip of paper, read it; smiled enigmatically, and placed it in his billfold.

When the contestants had reached Stead they found a de-activated Air Force base located near the center of what someone characterized as a dry Waskeruppe, and arid bowl ringed by 8000-ft. mountains a few miles to the west and lower hills on the other quadrants. Since the field elevation was 5000 feet, the surrounding mountains were not too impressive, the highest rising only 3000 feet above the ground. Immediately beyond, to the west, were the outrunners of the Sierras. They rose gradually and seemed small when compared to the ramparts of the same range 200 miles south. Nevertheless, tasks to the west would be ruled out by forests and increasingly rugged terrain in that direction. It was clear, then, that flying would be done north and south along the eastern watershed of the Sierras, and to the east over the Nevada desert. The north-south line was attractive because of its relatively numerous meadows, ranches, grazing areas, and the small towns on U.S. 395.

The courses to the east were formidable. The high Nevada desert is the most sparsely populated area of the U.S. Air charts recognize this fact by marking every ranch or farm building, and most of the 25 by

35-mile grids on the sectionals show only one or two. Sagebrush, rocks, absence of paved roads, water, and people would have to figure in pilots' decisions. A dozen or so mountain ranges thrust through the mile-high desert and arranged themselves in north-south corrugations that opposed the prevailing west and southwesterly winds. Since the ranges averaged nine to ten thousand feet in height, and peaks frequently exceeded eleven thousand, it was clear their slopes would be invaluable generators of wave, thermal, and ridge lift.

THE FIRST DAY

Pilots' briefing got underway readily. Marshall Claybourn announced the task: Hawthorne, Nevada, and return, a total distance of 202 miles. John Marsh, of the Reno Weather Bureau, gave his scientific blessings to the day's work. There would be excellent lift in the afternoon, marked with towering cu's. A shearline would occur north of Walker Lake. Thermals were expected to top out at 16,000 feet, with the triggering temperature of 72 degrees reached by 1100. Strong surface winds would continue, so Marshall cautioned that, "trailers will fly — under the proper conditions." Asked if there would be any way to confirm a start through the gate, he replied, "if you land we'll give it to you in writing!"

Irv Prue, Chief Starter, now had the job of getting the sixty-four pilots lined up and launched in the prescribed time. Stationed west of the runways, out amidst scrub brush, was the start gate triangulating team of Jim (No GO-GO) Rhine and Robert Bacon. Closer to the action was the start-line (Go-Go) team of Red Wright, Marshall Claybourn and Jerry Rhine with Gordon Wheeler and Suzy McEwan working as spotters. Between starts Marshall commented, "This is going to be a tough task, I hope we get 'em all back home."

SAILPLANE LAUNCHING AT THE 33RD

"Varying numbers of towplanes were used depending upon availability. As many as 15 towplanes were on hand. Initially most ropes were equipped with the European double ring. The rings gradually disappeared due to snagging, as most ropes were retained by the towplanes on landing—a great time saver.

"A single runway was used with the sailplanes arranged in three rows. The rows were 50 feet apart and the machines were staggered such that the lead sailplane was in the left lane and ten feet forward of the middle-row sailplane. This arrangement gave an automatic take-off order based on pilot choice. It is difficult to move up forward, past another ship, thus it was necessary to preposition sailplanes in the selected take-off order.

"All towplanes landed behind the sailplanes, taxiing by them to the right. Three rope handlers moved ropes to the sailplanes as towplanes taxied into place. Two people managed towplane traffic, one directing the towplane to the desired position, the other directing rope tauten-

ing and giving the 'Go' signal. This second person received his signals from the Chief Starter who held hand signs painted 'T' and 'Go.'

"On practice day the 65 sailplanes were launched in approximately 75 minutes. Most delays were due to inexperienced crews closing canopies, taping joints, forgetting take-off cards or tow tickets, and not being familiar with the tow-release characteristics of their sailplane.

"The first contest day didn't show much improvement, as there was much tension and haste which resulted in about the same total delays. In general all other days saw launches on the order of 50- to 60-second intervals. This performance was maintained consistently in spite of cross winds, 5000-ft. take-off altitude, towplanes of limited power, and large areas of strong down on the way up.

"I have attended three international championships and have never seen a better performance in cooperation on a sailplane launch line."

—IRV PRUE