

The course on June 28 took the pilots diagonally across two mountain ranges to Hawthorne which lay at the southern end of 25-mile-long Walker Lake. The second and easternmost of the ranges mentioned was the Wassuk. It ran along the western shore of the lake, reaching its maximum height at Mt. Grant, a 12,000-ft. peak west of the turnpoint.

By late morning all pilots were launched and had flown through the starting gate. Moffat left Stead with an altitude of 14,000 feet. From the cockpit of his Austria SH-1 he contemplated the mountains and desert ahead while he considered his strategy and tactic.

give the pilot a fast, straight highway to the turnpoint. But could he gain enough speed to justify the dogleg? Suppose the shearline were weak or didn't develop at all? What if he arrived too low to make contact?

George Moffat decided to ignore the temptation. A. J. Smith in his Sisu succumbed and swung left.

By early afternoon a new element entered the picture. Cumulus which appeared to be over the turnpoint at the southern end of the Wassuk range began to over-develop. It became imperative to get to Hawthorne and turn as quickly as possible. With this in mind, Moffat had managed to stretch his first glide



George Moffat in the Standard Austria.

"I felt it was not important to win, but that it was extremely important not to lose. (i.e., not winning first place in the task was less important than completing it each day.) The first day was a speed task. I had to cover the ground as quickly as possible and I realized I didn't cover ground when I flew in circles. One of the things that never ceases to amaze me is the number of people who circle 'round and 'round for no apparent reason.

"On the basis of the weather prognosis I had made a decision to work thermals of a given strength only and to leave them when my climb dropped below that level.

"I had also decided to fly straight whenever I was in areas where past experience had shown me I might expect general lift.

"I pointed the Austria's nose toward the north end of the Wassuks and started a straight glide toward them."

As the pilots wended their way southeast toward Hawthorne, they watched the horizon to the left for signs of a shearline. A convergence zone was known to exist between the air masses of a low centering over the Oregon-Washington region and a high to the southeast that was carrying moisture in from the Pacific. The first tell-tale signs of cloud streeting had appeared and so the agonizing business of assessment and decision began in the cockpits.

Should one leave the direct course line and turn left in hope of picking up the shear? This could mean being freed of the tyranny of thermal circling and

40 or 50 miles over the mountains and into Yerington Valley which lay to the west of the Wassuks. He had done this by pulling up (but not circling) whenever he had encountered lift. This required, no doubt, a measure of self-discipline as the altimeter unrolled until he finally found himself 3000 feet above the ground.

His judgment proved valid, however, and he found thermals in which he paused just long enough to enable him to reach the north end of the Wassuks. There he lowered the nose of the Austria and sped straight south over the sunny western slopes of the range.

In the meantime Smith, in his faster Sisu, had found the shearline on the other side and considerably to the east of the course. He followed it to Walker Lake, a slash of blue set in the ochre and rust of the desert. The eastern slopes of the Wassuks climbed from the lake shore to bare rocky upper slopes that still held snow in the crevices. But the magnificence of the scene was dimmed for Smith who looked ahead to the writhing cumulus mountain that cast its shadow over Mount Grant and the turnpoint at the southern end of the lake. Flying at high speed he crossed the water, circled Hawthorne and observed the turn panels. Shortly afterward he reached 16,000 feet, his best altitude, only to encounter heavy sink accompanied by hail, snow, and slush as he began his return. With dismay he watched an inch of ice build up on his leading edge as he threaded his way through sheets of precipitation and the ragged bottom of the cloud. He was flying on the eastern side when an opportunity to regain the western slopes appeared.