

While Linke and Thomson were enacting their drama north of Wells, Don Fisher, piloting a Vasama, was plodding along from thermal to thermal a hundred miles back near Lovelock, another small desert town on Highway 40. Fisher noticed a mountain ridge running north from Lovelock and reasoned that the sunny western slopes should provide better thermals than those he had been working near the highway. In addition, if he could get high enough and follow the ridge far enough he could line up the heavy tailwind exactly for a downwind run to Winnemucca, the next town, 50 miles east on 40.

"At the end of the ridge I got a good thermal that carried me into smooth lift that turned out to be a wave. After I had altitude, I looked ahead and saw range after range downwind to the east. For the rest of the afternoon I skipped from wave to wave—seven ranges in all—until I left the final one in my end-of-the-day glide out over the Great Salt Lake Desert."



The day-to-day coverage of the 33rd Nationals was prepared by Sylvia Colton. Stories From Stead, that part of the text which appears in italics, was written by Doug Lamont. All the photographs used in this article, including this one of Doug (left) and Sylvia chatting with A. J. Smith, were taken by George Uveges.

Daylight and altitude ran out at about the same time four hundred miles from Fisher's starting point and about fifty miles northwest of Ogden, Utah. He was about to begin his first lesson in the deceptiveness of desert distances.

"I climbed out of my ship and took my survival kit and a map. I could see an electric light on the horizon and figured it was a farm house. I started walking through the sagebrush expecting to make it in a few minutes. After an hour it was pitch black and the light seemed to be just as far away as ever. At the end of another hour I saw car lights by the house and thought, 'He's coming to pick me up!' But he drove off in the other direction.

"During the next hour I kept stumbling along and then the house lights began to go off. When I finally got there after a three-hour hike I was almost afraid to knock on the door for fear anyone approaching the house in silence at that time of the night might be met with a shotgun.

"But my fears were groundless. They gave me a ride to the nearest town and telephone."

Earlier in the day Moffat and Schreder had pondered the weather. Moffat's rigorous self-discipline had slipped and, ignoring his own conservative dicta, he had pressed too hard and been forced to land shortly after take-off. A restart got him off an hour behind the pack. As he gradually overtook the main body he observed the ground winds.

"I saw a trailer and truck combination with its dust blowing ahead of the rig. These monsters usually travel around 60 mph, so I knew the ground winds were really picking up.

"Besides that, a horizontal shear was working at 9000 feet. Not at 8500 or 9500, but right at 9000. Above that altitude the wind blew from the southwest as predicted, but below it veered to the west."

Moffat reasoned that the high ground winds would shred thermals, making it very difficult to maintain altitude below the shear.

"Strategy on a distance day in strong winds should be to conserve altitude at all costs. It is very important to stay high.

Schreder also noted a wind shift, but he must have been south of the convergence zone at the time because he reported it to be coming out of the south.

"The wind didn't check with the weather prog. The Salt Lake area, which had been predicted to be clear, had a cloud cover. Cumulus lift was weaker than we had been led to expect."

Like others in the vanguard, Schreder was catching up with the upper front which had not moved as fast as predicted and now blocked further progress along the original course line. Some attempted to penetrate the line. Of these John Brittingham in his Dart was most successful, reaching Pacatello, Idaho, a distance of 437 miles. For some hours it appeared his had been the best flight of the day.

Schreder, however, turned north and succeeded in crossing the windy Snake River Valley. But his efforts cost him much altitude so that for the second time in the meet he found himself trapped on a low hill. For two hours he flew figure eights over a 500-ft. spur of the Sawtooth Mountains. At one time the wind dropped momentarily and he prepared to land in a cultivated field near the base. Finally the wind picked up and he succeeded in reaching a larger ridge which in turn enabled him to move at last into the main mountains. But by this time so much time had been lost that he landed at Fairfield, Idaho, for a distance of 376 miles. To have gone farther would have taken him into the lava beds near the Craters of the Moon National Park, an area whose name tells what needs be known concerning landing fields.

Moffat, by virtue of his late start, didn't overtake the trailing edge of the front until he was on his final glide. He reported finding steady lift of nearly a meter per second, but since it was 7:45 he left it to beat the sunset. He stayed south and landed at Park Valley, Utah, for a distance of 372.5 miles.

Moffat, Schreder, and Thomson were surpassed by a number of pilots that day, including six who exceeded four hundred miles. Nevertheless, Moffat retained his firm hold on first place in the cumulative standings, followed closely by Schreder in second, and Thomson in fifth.

It was Ed McClanahan in a Libelle, however, who