

THE WINNER'S TALE

To do well in a national contest a pilot must have:
Cross-country and competition experience
A good crew
A good ship
The will to work and fly to win
Good luck

This year I had all five.

At the conclusion of the 1965 U. S. Nationals I drew up a design for a competition sailplane which would perform equally well in weak and strong conditions. I used to believe that the high wing loading of seven to seven and one-half pounds was the answer, but bitter experience has taught me that going down just once during a contest, on that weak day or weak period, wiped out all of the advantages of the lead sled.

The HP-14 evolved as a 55-foot span, five lbs./sq.ft., 20-to-1 aspect ratio compromise. I worked constantly on this ship, with only Saturday and Sunday evenings off, until the very day we left for Reno. This takes a very patient and dedicated wife. In spite of this tremendous effort, the first flight was not made until the day we left for Reno.

During practice flights before the contest the superior performance of the HP-14 became apparent. In spite of its light wing loading it could still stay with the Sisus, Libelles and Austrias at high speed. On the low-speed end it could slow down like a 1-26, but with the lowest sink of anything I have ever flown.

The weather in Reno this year was fabulous. We flew nine days under near perfect conditions. Never in any U.S. Contest have we had the variety of lift found here. There were plain thermals, shadow thermals, evening-valley thermals, slope thermals, primary, secondary, tertiary (etc.) waves, dust devils, ridge lift, convergence lift and shearline lift.

Our only rest day was forced by a 443-mile flight. One pilot complained that he had made Gold distance, but only placed 30th for the day.

Landing in rough country surrounding Reno took a heavy toll of good sailplanes. Daily reports of damage helped to keep me cautious.

After the first three days it became apparent that the weather was reliable enough to allow the crew and car to remain at Stead Air Force Base on all race days. This saved a lot of wear and tear—and cash—and kept the crew in better shape for flight preparation and distance-flight chasing. My crew drove 400 miles on a speed task before we adopted this tactic.

My general strategy for the entire contest was to:

Stay up at all costs.

Center as perfectly as possible in all thermals.

Pass up all thermals of less than 500 ft. per minute unless low.

Leave all thermals when their strength dropped below 500 ft. per minute.

Run at 80 miles per hour or better between thermals unless low.

I had three frustrating experiences which could have drastically altered my contest standings. They were:

1. On the second task I nearly went down about 25 miles out and spent an uncomfortable 45 minutes on a 200-foot rock pile at the southern tip of Pyramid Lake.

2. On the fifth task I was leading the pack and made a 40-mile glide across Snake River Valley, Idaho to the foothills of the Pioneer Mountains (where strong conditions existed). Here I was trapped on a 400-foot knoll from 5 to 7 P.M. When I finally succeeded in getting off it was too late to get more than 15 additional miles.

3. On the final day, while passing over the starting line, a violent negative gust threw my emergency kit out of the baggage compartment through the rear canopy. I tried to complete the speed task but, after 30 miles, turned back and landed at Stead for repairs as the constant roar of the wind was shattering my ears and nerves. My crew was ready with cardboard and tape and, assisted by E. J. Reeves, Marshall Claybourn and Herman Stiglmeier, fashioned an airworthy rear canopy while I made a much needed rest stop.



The victors, Angie and Dick Schreder, with the duPont Trophy.

The final-day delay proved to be a blessing in disguise, as thermals were at a maximum all the way around and gave me the only day of the contest that I did not think that I could have done better.

Although many pilots utilized the frequent waves of the Reno area, and got very high, I flew in waves only twice and left at 16,000 feet both times because the lift became too low.

The Reno Nationals were very well organized and smoothly run. All tasks were well chosen. Site facilities were excellent. For those who had time and money, the Casinos proved to be very fascinating. Contest soaring conditions were excellent and the best in which I have ever flown. I did miss the complete lack of evening social affairs but the extent of late flying and retrieving probably influenced the organizers in omitting this detail.

The HP-14 and I flew 64.3 hours for 2511 contest miles in nine days. It was necessary to average more than 900 points per task to stay ahead of George Moffat who flew superbly every day. Flying with this greatest assembly of top competition pilots in the 33rd U.S. Nationals has given me my greatest thrill since taking up the sport of soaring in 1956.