

# Fly by Winch



If you've never made a winch tow you haven't lived and if you've never experienced Larry Gehrlein's postage-stamp tow pattern, you truly have something to look forward to. It's the only pattern I've flown that I could call fully acrobatic. It happened to me quite unexpectedly and I consider it one of my most exciting flying experiences.

As I trailered my HP-10 homeward from the Nationals along the Ohio Turnpike, I became acutely aware that I wasn't going to have enough cash to pay the tolls East let alone eat and buy gas. I decided to drop in at the Thermal G Ranch and check out on the winch so I could add a glider rating to my license and also use this as an excuse to extract some working capital from Larry Gehrlein. This innocent situation tossed me in the middle of the most exciting six airplane rides I've had since the days of the MIT club Franklin in the mid-thirties. I point out now that this story is not a commercial, and I paid my three dollars each time I flew Larry's 2-22. I follow with a quick picture of my impressions which may give you a hint of what it was like to suddenly and unexpectedly take part in this precision miniature flight operation.

The winch was out of sight over the hill, and I guess there was 500 feet of runway showing in front of the 2-22 to the top of the hill where the wind tee was. The red cable-drag chute lay on the ground ahead of the ship as Larry's son Jay held the nose down and I got into a 2-22 for the second time in my life. Larry then climbed in the back while giving me a concise course of instructions. Jay hooked up the cable, then ran to the CB radio and notified his brother Rodney at the winch that we were ready, then ran back and

raised our wing. Seconds later the drag chute leaped forward, the tail of the 2-22 struck the ground firmly and we accelerated forwards. As the speed picked up there became enough control to pick up the tail with the elevators. We became airborne and flew level for 30 or 40 feet while we gained speed. Then easing back on the stick starts the hairiest 45-degree climb you ever saw, about like riding up the starting ramp on a roller coaster. Larry's continued instructions from the back seat pointed out the need to hold the nose up as the speed dropped off at the top of the climb. With the stick firmly back we slowed down to about 40 mph over the winch which was still not visible under our nose. The ship levelled off somewhat, and we flew off the tow ring with an audible click. I pulled the tow release to be sure that click wasn't a wire breakage which might leave us flying the pattern with 700 feet of armored wire to wrap around the wind tee or somebody's cow.

Larry had set the altimeter at minus 50 feet because the end of the runway was 50 feet below the top of the hill and that was my first inkling of what a precision pocket pattern we were about to fly. About the time I began to wonder what I was doing there, flying away from the field at 40 mph and 700 feet, we dropped the nose to get 45 mph on the clock and made a 180 to the left on to the downwind leg. At 500 feet we were to be opposite the tee, turn left 90 degrees and cross the tee at 400 feet, then we were to fly on across until we reached 300 feet and turn 90 degrees to the right, downwind again, reach the road at 200 feet and turn into base. Spoilers on and slip if necessary to squeeze in over a pair of big