

# A SHE-GULL'S EYE VIEW OF WHAT THE HE-MEN DO (EVERY BIT OF IT TRUE) AND INCLUDING A BOO-BOO OR TWO

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Who, me? Fly in the Nationals? The idea seemed a little ridiculous to me. It's true that I had the minimum qualification, a Gold badge—thanks to a lucky flight at Sun Valley in 1963. And the Fauvette, though no high-speed charger for western conditions, was a fairly respectable bird in which to float around. But I had only flown 28 hours in the 11 months since we had bought this French sailplane. And I had only entered three soaring contests in all my years of flying, one of which was at Torrey Pines—hardly a proving ground for Nationals-type flying.



Photo by George Uvages

Rose Marie gets a friendly pat from Debbie Uhalt before take off.

I had been interested in planes and flying from my childhood days in Wichita, Kansas, where Beech, Boeing and Cessna all manufactured airplanes. My first flying lessons were in a Piper Cub at age 17, and my first introduction to sailplanes in grad school where my talents as tow pilot were readily accepted. But school, marriage, work, housekeeping, and raising two young crewmen, left little room for soaring. In over 15 years I had accumulated only some 80 hours of glider flying.

No wonder it seemed foolish to me to join the best soaring pilots of the U.S. in the no-doubt formidable tasks that would be assigned over the not-always-so-hospitable Nevada terrain. But my husband, Lloyd, encouraged me to give it a try, and I do enjoy soaring, so after much hesitation and vacillation I finally made up my mind to enter. Who knows when the opportunity might again present itself?

So we went, and what an education it was! When I consider that the 43 hours flown in ten days was approximately half of my previous flying time gained in 15 years, and the 1075 miles I flew were more than the total of all my previous cross-country mileage, it becomes evident that I had a very comprehensive course in sailplane flying. And it was quite noticeable to me that my flying ability was improving steadily as the days wore on.

No doubt many pilots went to Reno with the idea of flying to win. My goals were not so ambitious. They were to get through the meet without serious damage to sailplane or self—and not to come in last! Since these were accomplished, it was a successful contest from my amateurish point of view.

"Be prepared" is a good motto, and I thought we had made a fair attempt to do so but it turned out that we were not at all ready for the first day of contest flying. The last time we had flown at El Mirage the radio had worked fine so, after buying a new set of batteries for spares, I crossed it off the list of things to worry about. Both Lloyd and I had jobs to wind up and were unable to get away until the last minute, so didn't arrive in Reno until Sunday noon, a day and a half before start of the contest. On my first familiarization flight that afternoon I was chagrined to discover that the radio receiver did not work. The next morning in town several tubes were replaced but it still would not work. Fortunately the transmitter did work, although not as well as usual, and Al Santilli of Albuquerque generously loaned me his little transistor receiver for the whole contest. This makeshift arrangement of using two radios was better than none, but several times our poor communications caused delays in getting together with my crew which added to our general weariness as the days wore on. I wonder if the serious pilots bring spare radios along?

Monday was the practice task day but another discovery kept me from flying at all that day. A pre-flight examination disclosed that some of the aileron hinges were loose. We took both ailerons off to examine them. To our regret we found that quick repairs were impossible, for originally the hinge fittings had been glued in and had just worked loose at the point nearest the control rods. We fiberglassed these back in and hoped to be ready to fly the next morning. The resin used, however, was a slow acting one and was still soft and unsatisfactory the next morning. Irv Koff of the China Lake group (one of Charlie Drew's crewmen) generously offered to clean it up and start over using some of Dr. McEwan's fast-setting resins. So we spent the best part of the day applying the heat gun and chewing fingernails while everyone took off on the first task.