



Photo by George Uveges

The Nationals starting line, Rose Marie found out to her consternation, is as good a spot as any to get into trouble. Here, at the beginning of one contest day, she proved that it was possible to take a considerable drubbing in the battle for the want of a nail.

To be in such a state of affairs was inexcusable and the comedy of errors compounded itself as the day went on. When I finally took off late in the afternoon, the tow pilot thought it was a local flight and did not take me to the proper release point. I had no choice but to land and take off again at 4:00 P.M. for my first contest flight. By this time the usual strong westerly afternoon winds were blowing and I could not find much in the way of good thermals. I drifted over to the north-south range of mountains to the east of Reno and decided to ridge soar south. About 6:30 I ran out of steam and landed at Minden, only 42 miles south of Stead. Hawthorne, the turn point, is southeast of Reno and my crew made the unfortunate decision to head east from Reno and take the next valley south. Thus they ended up on the other side of the mountains. (This was due partly to our impaired radio communications and partly to my lack of definite commands to my crew. From then on I always tried to tell them where I wanted them to go.) Miles of dirt roads and a flat tire later they arrived at Minden—at 11:00 P.M.—and we got back to Reno about 1:00 A.M. To add to the confusion my mother arrived by commercial airliner at Reno at 7:00 P.M., not knowing where we had made arrangements for her to stay. Forty pilots completed the task and, no doubt, had pleasant evenings around the swim pools or gaming tables; I decided that contests are no picnic for the poorer pilots!

I blundered along close to last place for several days but slowly gained confidence as I became familiar with the terrain and my proficiency increased with the daily flying. Several other lessons were learned the hard way. On the second day Joe Robertson and I landed near each other, about two miles from a mine in one direction and seven miles from the main road in the opposite direction. The mine looked operative to me from the air and Joe had seen a car go up to it so we decided to hike up there. We left no message at either plane. While we were at the mine, which turned out to be abandoned, we saw Joe's crew drive to each glider and then head back toward civilization. Eventually we got together with our crews but extra time and energy were expended to naught.

"Have a written checklist and use it!" is advice I wish I had heeded. The fourth contest day was a short speed task from Stead to Smith Valley and return for a round trip of 134 miles. Waves were forecast and by the end of the day several pilots had achieved Diamond altitude. We had topped off our oxygen bottle that morning and I had watched Lloyd turn it on and read the gauge on the instrument panel, so dismissed the oxygen status from my thinking. Lloyd, however, turned it off again at the bottle (after listening for leaks), with the intention of turning it on again at the flight line. It was forgotten in the last-minute rush and I took off without checking it. Following several other pilots, I managed to work into the weak wave directly over the field at about 10,000 feet. By flying just above stall speed I was able to slowly climb up to 14,700 feet as I headed south toward Mt. Rose. Now I had discovered that I had no oxygen, and being unable to turn it on, finally decided that I should descend to 12 or 13,000 feet to be on the safe side. Unfortunately, this took me out of the wave and into turbulence. The strong winds chopped up thermals and made ridge soaring unpleasant and, it seemed to me, rather dangerous. I struggled on but after two and a half hours in the air I had only covered 32 miles and was forced to land in a field in the pass east of Carson City. Those contestants who were unable to find the wave seemed to have problems staying up similar to mine, and eleven pilots did not even get away from the field that day.

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Saturday was the free-distance day and another boo-boo for me as my sons say. I am recounting these mistakes in the hope that they may help some other beginning competition pilot to be more successful—and in the hope that I will remember not to repeat them. This day the weather report was good. I was well prepared (oxygen turned on), had a Diamond-goal declaration made, an early take-off time, and was confident that I had a chance to make a nice flight. The ship next to me took off and, as I closed the hatch and started to lock it, the emergency canopy release pin fell out and dropped down under the seat. Normally we have a small piece of masking tape on this to hold it in place when the