

canopy is not latched, but it had come off unnoticed. As Lloyd groped around for it, Herman, intent on his one-minute take-off schedule, and rightly so, unhooked my tow rope and gave the Cub to the next ship in line. A few seconds later we had the pin back in place but the next towplane to taxi up was the Beech Mentor. As we took off, he folded his gear at 90 mph and then slowed down to 85 for the serious business of climbing up to altitude. But, unfortunately, the Fauvette is a gentle bird used to being towed at 65 mph and I was having a wild ride on my end of the tow line. Thermals were already popping and turbulence existed quite close to the ground. About 300 or 400 feet up I got so far out of tow position that the tow hitch released automatically, leaving me in the position of looking for an immediate landing spot and groping for a few appropriate (and un-lady-like) words to express my displeasure! I landed straight ahead on a road in a rather empty subdivision area just outside the boundaries of Stead AFB.

Then came frustration. I radioed the field that I was down, but my crew received conflicting reports of my position. There were dozens of sailplanes in the air by now and pilots were busy radioing crews to head out. My crew couldn't hear me and all in the air seemed too busy to relay messages. I was disgusted and no doubt everyone else was disgusted with me and my crew for cluttering up the air. Finally, thanks to an airplane relaying messages, my crew located me. After dismantling a locked gate, they arrived to quickly take the ship apart, dash back to the field and re-assemble for a second two hours after the first one. That night my only consolation was that, in spite of the late start, I had managed a 172-mile flight to Battle Mountain with nearly five hours in the air and had passed up a few of the fellows.

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By this time I was pretty exhausted, what with landing off the field every day, and I began to wonder if this was truly a vacation. Fortunately the next day was really a rest day for me and my crew. I did not envy those 400-milers their long drive back to Stead.

I believe Monday, the Fourth of July, was my most satisfying contest flight, and it was the first day that I made it back to the field. The task was distance along a fixed course, 125 miles south to Lee Vining, with return on a heading through Alturas. It took me five and a half hours to get to the turn into a headwind and three to make it back to Reno. By this time it was 7:00 P.M. and I just squeaked in, wondering if I might end up on the dry lake at the end of the runway. That was not the only anxious moment though, for as I crossed a particularly rugged pass north of Bridgeport, without much excess altitude, and in a spot where the road goes through canyons and landing areas are few and far between, I wondered why I was doing such a crazy thing as flying in this contest. Then south of Bridgeport I was down over a wet area to within 700 feet of landing and had asked my crew to check on a couple of possible landing spots. But finally I caught a weak thermal and slowly worked it up to 17,000 feet over 10,000-foot Potato Peak. This gave me an excellent start for the run to the turnpoint over

the Mono Lake area that might have worried me if I had been lower. So little separated success from failure here! And I won't soon forget the beautiful view of Lake Tahoe as I cruised along above the mountains that separate Tahoe from Reno on my way south.

The margin between success and failure was slim the following day too, when I spent 45 minutes some 800 feet above an open mine next to some hills I couldn't cross. Finally Charlie Drew in his BG-12 and Walt Mooney in AGCSC's 1-26 flew in beside me and between the three of us we found the best place to inch our way up. Squeaking over the hills, we dove for a dust devil which jolted us up to nearly 17,000 feet. Eventually I made it back to complete my first speed task. My good friend Walt and I were friendly rivals at the lower end of the standings. He did an excellent job of flying that 1-26.

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My biggest disappointment was in not making it back to the field the last day on a triangular speed task. Waves and strong winds were forecast again and this time I was prepared with oxygen and heavy boots. I found the wave, along with some other pilots, and eventually worked my way to 23,100 feet near the first turnpoint (a few hundred feet short of Diamond altitude). I made the two turnpoints in fine style but goofed up coming home, lost the wave, got caught in turbulence near the mountains that gave me the worst scare of my soaring experience. The interesting thing about this nearly five-hour flight is that most of it was flown at an airspeed below 45 mph. This was the speed I found necessary to stay in and climb in the weak wave. Also, most of the flight was made above 15,000 feet and, as I found it necessary to keep the air vent open to prevent my glasses from fogging, I soon became uncomfortable from the cold. The two wave flights at Reno were my first experiences with this type of soaring, and an unexpected bonus. So ended the 33rd Nationals; wonder if I'll make the 34th?

Every so often a non-soaring person has asked me if soaring isn't dangerous, seeming sometimes to infer that perhaps it is not a proper activity for a wife and mother with responsibilities at home to engage in. I have usually answered that soaring is as safe as one wishes to make it, and that with a little judgment and elementary caution one should be better off than on most of our high-speed highways. On further contemplation (on the way home from Reno), it occurred to me that cruising around within gliding distance of the local airport is apt to be both as safe and as boring as would be living in jail or in a well-planned socialist society. Perhaps a little of the fascination and challenge of soaring is just that touch of excitement and danger that comes from the pitting of mind, body, and machine against nature. A little fright such as occurred to me that last day while being tossed around uncontrollably in the turbulence below the wave, when anxiety said to speed up to get out of this mess, but mind said slow down to ease the jolts to the bucking sailplane, makes the sense of accomplishment at having seen the world from 23,000 feet seem even more satisfying. Perhaps it helps give rise to that feeling that one is to some degree master of his own fate and perhaps worthy of walking on the face of this earth.