



THE MAX-OUT

Newsletter of the Magnificent Mountain Men

AMA CHARTERED CLUB #177



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<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MMMFreeFlight/>

2016-07 (December)



PONDERINGS DEP'T

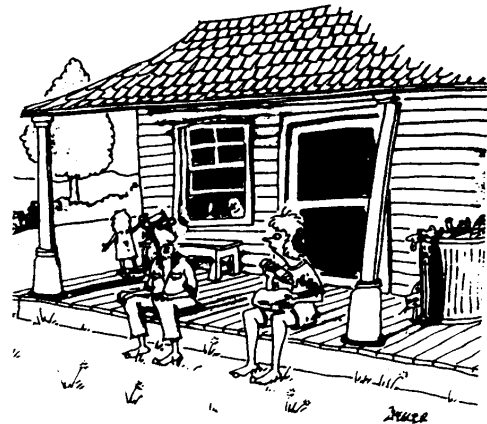
The outdoor season is over and the Indoor season is upon us. Good news is Rob Romash and Jerry Murphy have arranged some flying in the Colorado Springs Olympic Velodrome !

But first, the Annual Business Planning meeting is December 3rd at the Hickory House 10335 S Parker Rd, Parker, CO 80134.

Be there... 11:30 for lunch and the meeting starts at 12:30. Many good things to be had and seen.

Election of officers for 2017 is high on the agenda as well as some important contest business.

Thermals!, or heat from the lights, or whatever... !! ... Rick



"Ma ... I'm 'agoin to the MMM Meeting on the 3rd."

"Ochroma lagopus in perpetuum"

"The MAX-OUT" newsletter is printed about the second or third (?) week of the month. Submissions should be not later than the end of the prior month.

TO JOIN THE CLUB OR SUBSCRIBE

- Full membership is offered to any current AMA member: \$TBD
- Newsletter Subscription Only: \$15
- Send \$ to:
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NEAR TERM EVENTS:

MMM MONTHLY GET TOGETHER MTG!	Every Third Tuesday at 7:00 PM, Dinner at the Castle Cafe in Castle Rock. Check with the Yahoo web group for info.
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HEADS UP: !!!!

Edwards Field Lease Contributions

As part of our having a flying sites, we also lease the Edwards FF Base in Colorado Springs. It does cost money and we solicit contributions to help offset that cost. You can donate directly to the MMM Paypal opportunity noted below.

Motorcycle Use on the Field

Policy:

Follow the roads wherever possible and not to follow the planes cross-country. Take the shortest path possible to the plane in order to retrieve it. Avoid riding through noxious weeds.

MMM Now accepts "PAYPAL" for Dues, Contest Entry Fees, Etc !!

- Simply Log in to paypal.com (or create your own 'PAYPAL' account if you want)
- Click on "Send Money" in the upper menu bar
- In the "To" block, type in mmmffclub@gmail.com, the amount, and click the button "Services"
- In the next form where you confirm payment, in the Lower "Subject" and "Message" boxes state what the money is for... annual dues, entry fees and such.

PRESIDENT'S PONDERINGS

Jerry Murphy

November 2016



How about this picture of the old fellow at Muncie.

Here we are at the end of the outdoor season for the MMM Club. We had a good year even though we did have a few windy days out on the hill.

FINAL OUTDOOR EVENT

Our final event of the year was the tenth annual Frito Pie contest. Dave Wineland led the event as the CD and we enjoyed a great day of flying along with the traditional Frito Pie lunch and entertainment provided by Ray Boyd's friends, the Irish folk band "Rosin The Bow" with Marta Day fiddle, Grant Day guitar and vocals, and Fris Saprand bass guitar and vocals. They surprised us with a special version of the club's theme song.

If you want to relive this wonderful event they will be playing at the Westminster Brewing Company on Saturday January 14 from 7 to 10 pm.

You can learn more about this fun group at their web site www.rosinthebow.com

Those who missed this day on the field missed a truly great day of flying and fun. How many clubs have professional musicians to entertain on the field? It is no wonder people say we are a great club!

The Annual Meeting

Be sure to grab the calendar on the wall and highlight ***Saturday December 3 for BBQ at the Hickory House at 11:30 and then the annual meeting at 12:30.***

We need to elect officers for the 2017 term, review the club's finances, and set the 2017 schedule.

On the subject of the 2017 schedule we need to discuss the future of the MMM 14 Round Contest. I have sent out a Survey Monkey questioner to about 80 FAI flyers and others who usually attend this contest to determine their feelings. I will present these findings at the meeting.

There will be a special presentation by Jace Pivonka on his experiences in two world champs.

The club's annual awards will also be presented. This will be a great opportunity to cheer for our champions.

There will also be a sale of various free flight items that have been donated to the club, So bring your checkbook to pay your dues and perhaps take home something you need to male more maxs in 2017.



Those who missed this day on the field missed a truly great day of flying and fun. How many clubs have professional musicians to entertain on the field? It is no wonder people say we are a great club!

Dewey Reinhard Named to the Colorado Springs Sports Hall of Fame

Our fellow MMMer and good buddy Dewey Reinhard was named to the Colorado Springs Sports hall of Fame. The induction ceremony took place at the Broadmoor the evening of October 25. I did not make it as the tickets were \$125. That will buy lots of balsa. Congratulations to Dewey as he receives this well deserved honor.

Their Last Thermals... Rest in Peace

Karl Morgan

Karl Lester Morgan, 87, of Idaho Falls, passed away on September 16, 2016, at his home. He was a lifelong airplane modeler and a member of the Society of Antique Modelers (AMA Club #1 out of Denver), specializing in pre-1942 free flight planes powered by gasoline or rubber

Dave Saks

Dave Saks died 11/25, succumbing to a very aggressive type of cancer. Dave was 64 years old and was a long time member of the MMM club. Dave was the first person to win places on two FAI teams, F1B and F1E in 2012, in the same season in recent history. I believe the other person to do so was Herb Kothe. Dave was a member of the development team for the Gossamer Albatross. There is no doubt in my mind that his exceptional building skills and workmanship played a key part in the success of that project. His most recent employment was as a craftsman restoring Corsairs.

MMM Scramble, November 6, 2016, "Frito Pie" contest summary

Like last year, we had great weather throughout the day; very calm to mild drift for most of the day with temperatures reaching into the '70's. Thermals were there but tricky to read. We had 12 flyers; pretty good for the last contest. The scramble champ was Don DeLoach flying FAC OT stick, with four straight maxes. Second was Mark Covington (HLG, 3 maxes + 66 s = 426 s). Jerry Murphy was 3rd (B-electric, 351 s), with the next four entries within 9 s of Jerry's score (Skilly DeLoach was 4th).

It was great to see Pete McQuade (and Marilyn) on the field. Pete has had a tough 2016 recovering from a 2nd knee replacement and other medical issues; he said that in the summer, he was afraid he simply might not be able to return to flying. Hard to tell as he was going strong all day flying F1A in rounds; he dropped only one flight out of seven, the last max completed just as the contest was ending (and it was getting dark). Great flying Pete, and glad you're back!

The Frito-pie "luncheon" was enjoyed by all – thanks once again to Jerry and Don for supplying the food and to Jerry for cooking it up with help from Darold Jones. During the luncheon, we had live music from the group "Rosin the Bow" featuring Chris, Marta, and Grant. This is the second year in a row that we've been able to enjoy this; thanks again to Ray Boyd, who plays in the symphony with one of the group members, and arranged their visit to the field.

Sunday was a great way to close out the season - sorry for those who couldn't make it but be thinking about next season; if we can have more days like these, 2017 will be a great year.

Dave Wineland, CD



MMM FRITO PIE Scramble Results

ENTER CONTEST DATE:		11/6/16							
ENTER CD NAME:		Dave Wineland							
MMM MONTHLY SCRAMBLE									
						ENTER	Best Factored Score =	6.43	
	DATE	EVENT	ENTRANT	CLASS	# MAXES	TOTAL AMA	SCRAMBLE TIME	FACTORED SCORE	SCRAMBLE POINTS
1	11/6/16	3 Min	Pete McQuade	F1A	6	1157	1157	6.43	100
2	11/6/16	2 Min	Don DeLoach	FAC OT-stick	4	480	480	4.00	62
3	11/6/16	SG	Mark Covington	HLG	3	426	426	3.55	55
4	11/6/16	2 Min	Jerry Murphy	B-electric	2	351	351	2.93	46
5	11/6/16	2 Min	Skilly DeLoach	P-30	2	349	349	2.91	45
6	11/6/16	2 Min	Ray Boyd	FAC OT	2	348	348	2.90	45
7	11/6/16	2 Min	Herb Kothe	FAC OT	2	345	345	2.88	45
8	11/6/16	2 Min	Jerry Murphy	A-electric	1	342	342	2.85	44
9	11/6/16	3 Min	Mark Covington	Cl. Towline	0	402	402	2.23	35
10	11/6/16	2 Min	Bill Carney	P-30	0	160	160	1.33	21
11	11/6/16	2 Min	Darold Jones	F1G	0	139	139	1.16	18
12	11/6/16	3 Min	Chuck Etherington	F1C	0	95	95	0.53	8
13	11/6/16	2 Min	Jerry Murphy	E-36	0	58	58	0.48	8
14	11/6/16	3 Min	Dave Wineland	C Gas	0	0	0	0.00	0

2016 SUMMARY SCRAMBLE RESULTS !!!



MMM 2016 Scramble SUMMARY

DATA ON THIS PAGE IS CUT AND PASTED
FROM MONTHLY CONTEST RESULTS AND SORTED

	ENTRANT	Total Pts	4/24/16	5/15/16	6/12/16	8/7/16	8/21/16	9/25/16	10/16/16	11/6/16
1	Mark Covington	503	100		61	100	100	87		55
2	Don DeLoach	347			78	52	55	100		62
3	Jerry Murphy	278	33		75		59	67		44
4	Ray Boyd	241	14		50	38	21	73		45
5	Bill Carney	200	30		74	14	61			21
6	Jace Pivonka	171			100			71		
7	John McGrath	145			69		8	68		
8	Rick Pangell	129			49	8		72		
9	Herb Kothe	100				55				45
10	Skilly DeLoach	100					55			45
11	Pete McQuade	100								100
12	Mike Fedor	98					98			
13	Darold Jones	98			55			25		18
14	Mel Gray	46			46					
15	Stan Huyger	44			44					
16	Tm Arnold	18				18				
17	Chuck Etherington	8								8
18	Jeff Pakiz	4				4				
18	John Berryman	1				1				

Note: This story was originally planned as a follow-up to one that appeared in The MaxOut, issue 2007-2, March/April/May 2007. To borrow the worn-out excuse, life got in the way. Fortunately, I took good notes at the time, and the happenings were unforgettable. I hope you'll agree they're entertaining. So, with apologies for my tardiness, I give you the second installment, just in time for the 10th anniversary of the events. And, appropriately, in time for Halloween.



A Lost Hills Diary The 2006 FAI Finals and Livotto International

Part 2 Night of the Purple Moon: A Most Peculiar Chase

Part 1 of this story described how Jerry Murphy, Chuck Etherington, and I made the 1,100-mile drive to Lost Hills, California for the 2006 FAI Team Selection Finals. Chuck would fly F1C gas and I would fly F1A towline glider. Murph had generously offered to be my "pit crew." We practiced on the field there for the three days leading up to Juan

Livotto's two-day "California FAI Invitational" contest, commonly referred to as "The Livotto International." This promised to be an excellent warm-up for the Finals and attracted not only most of the Finals participants, but also competitors from as far away as Denmark, Finland, Holland, Spain, and Ukraine. F1A glider and F1B Wakefield rubber were on the first day of the Livotto, October 7, 2006. F1C would be the next day.

Twenty-eight glider competitors lined up for the opening round at 8:00 am that clear, chilly Saturday morning. The sun's rising shortly before had appeared as a blood-red ball floating up through sea-like waves of smoke from the huge wildfire raging in the Los Padres National Forest, seventy-five miles to the south. The morning breeze carried the smell of burnt forest, lending the whole event a strange, ominous feeling.

Wanting to save my best-performing model, #20, for the Finals, I chose to fly my oldest bunter, #18. This reliable eight-year-old glider was overweight by a hefty 12 grams and possessed only moderate glide performance, but was rugged, reliable, and consistent, especially in the bunt and while thermalling.

The extended max for this first round was three and a half minutes. Murph gave my model an excellent launch. After trying to get downwind and piggyback off other fliers, I eventually picked my own air. Good old #18 delivered the goods, with a terrific, high bunt into a barely discernible thermal. The flight looked good for the first 2 minutes and 45 seconds; then the lift evaporated. After 45 nail-biting seconds, I gasped in relief when the airplane glided into the desert dirt at 3:35, five seconds over the max.

The next three flights were all easy maxes, with #18 well into her stride and working the solid thermals well. In Round 5, I piggybacked off another glider that had bunted to my right moments before and was looking good. It took a little while for my glider to chase the thermal, but once it connected, it rode the express elevator all the way up, as the moderate breeze carried the

model to the southeast, out over tall dry grass and stubble. The chase was an easy half-mile of putt-putting on my Honda dirt bike. I saw the model touch down and was making a beeline for it when some silent thing brushed the top of my hat, startling me. In the blink of an eye, a DT'd Wakefield appeared out of nowhere, plopping to the ground directly in front me. I hit the brakes and steered to the right to avoid it. Knowing I was too late, I leaned the bike hard to the right and dumped it onto its side, bracing myself for the inevitable sound of crunching balsa and carbon fiber.

When I looked, my spine tingled. The bike's front tire was poised less than two inches above the model's right wing. The only damage was to my frazzled nerves, especially when I recognized the color scheme on the wing. The model belonged to World Champion Alex Andriukov. Shaking, I moved his airplane to safety, righted my bike, and went on my way. I wondered what kind of disaster his timekeepers must have observed in their binoculars. "Alex," they might be saying, "some guy just ran over your airplane." As I drove on, I also contemplated the model identifier number on Alex's airplane--this was his 208th F1B. I felt humbled—my fleet topped out at a paltry 21.

My sixth-round flight was shortly after a dust devil had come through nearby, taking another flier's Nordic glider to breathtaking heights. Following a great bunt, #18 started gliding upward nicely. Less than a minute later, however, it seemed to fall off a cliff. As it sank, so did my heart. One circle in the down stuff. Two circles. Lower and lower. Finally, and not a second too soon, the model leveled off. Then a momentary bump. And another. Finally, #18 snagged the elusive boomer and soared majestically to a high-up max.

Our team—Murph and I—were clean going into Round 7, the last regular round. We had a lot of company—many other fliers had perfect scores, too. It was windier now, and everyone was hot, dusty, and tired. The gregarious Vasi Beschasny of Ukraine was

waiting at the next pole position, and we chatted as we watched other fliers tow up and begin circling. Suddenly Vasi was off, joining them. He didn't waste much time, and had soon bunted and was headed for a sure max. Norm Smith towed up next, and I decided to join the fun. I began circling near Pierre Brun, which is always a good idea. Nearby, Brian Van Nest bunted into good air. I started jogging in that direction, but before I got far, #18 slammed head-on into the wall of rising air. The line tension was so strong, it was impossible to get a graceful, running set-up for the bunt. Nevertheless, my extemporized choppy-step dance netted impressive height and the monster thermal took over from there. Soon #18 was a tiny dot in the sky. Murph, I, and #18 were headed for the flyoffs, along with ten other fliers.

To stand on the flight line awaiting the start of the five-minute flyoff flight later that afternoon was an awesome experience. The remaining fliers included Vasi, Mike McKeever—the reigning F1A World Champion—and other ace fliers like Rene Limberger, Andrew Barron, Dallas Parker, Mike Thompson, and Javier Abad. The conditions in the fifteen-minute window for this flyoff round were splendid and all eleven of us made the 300-second max.

However, by the time we came back for the seven-minute flyoff round, the air was cooling and the thermals were dying. I was thrilled to have made it this far, and it was with a sense of adventure that I prepared #18. It would have been better tactics to use my best gliding model, #20, but I didn't want to chance breaking or losing it before the Finals, which were still four days away. I chatted glibly with Murph as I set #18's mechanical timer. I'd never before set it for a seven-minute flight, but how difficult could it be? Just advance the DT arm two grooves past the five-minute mark on the timer's scroll—right? Sure. That put it in the last groove, right in the center of the scroll disk. As we strolled to the line, I was unaware of my serious mistake. For the time being, though, ignorance was bliss.

The desert landscape began to take on the yellow shades of a sun hovering low above the horizon but not yet about to set. At the starting horn, I towed up in the brisk breeze and went off to the end of the line, to have a clear area for circling. Andrew towed quite a distance upwind, and I watched him. With just a few minutes left in the round, I felt a thermal beginning to build, surely one of the last of the day. I continued to circle, sampling it, sizing it up. Suddenly Andrew bunted. His glider was riding in the upwind part of the thermal I was testing. I waited for his model to pass overhead, then brought #18 downwind to set up my launch. The bunt—and the air—were superb; the model circled upward, not rapidly, but with a reassuringly steady determination as it headed downwind to the south. Chuck Etherington, having offered to chase for me, immediately set off on his motorcycle, intent on getting underneath the glider and staying there until it landed.

The minutes slowly ticked off. Three minutes...four...five. The fast-retreating model was still climbing—it had become a speck, even in the timekeeper's binoculars. "I'm not sure how much longer I can keep it," he said, frustrated. Six minutes... Finally, he stopped the watch. "Sorry," he sighed, cursing under his breath. "With all the haze, I just couldn't see it anymore. I'm really sorry, 'cause it was still high up." The time he recorded was 6:12—short of the max by 48 seconds. I bit my tongue then thanked him for trying so hard.

Somehow, the disappointment of missing a certain max wasn't as bitter as I expected. Just knowing we'd actually, if not officially, done it was deeply satisfying. Murph and I milled around and chatted as we waited for Chuck to return with the model.

We waited and waited until just before the sun went down. Something wasn't right. Then Chuck appeared on his bike, empty-handed. "It never DT'd," he said resignedly. "I followed it to Highway 46, and it was still high up. I kept on going till I got to Highway 33 and I had to stop there."

I whistled under my breath—that was more than six miles. With darkness about to fall and the faint smell of smoke still hanging in the air, the three of us decided to pack up the minivan and head to where Chuck had last seen #18. The glider carried a Walston radio transmitter, so we'd use my tracking receiver to continue the search. Just before we set off, we learned that four fliers had made the seven-minute max. Rene Limberger, Mike McKeever, Vasi Beschasny, and Andrew Barron would meet early the next morning for a ten-minute-max flyoff. A small part of my brain protested that I should be with them. But the rest of me didn't much care—I just wanted to get #18 back.

We hurried down Holloway Road as the last wispy streaks of sunset died. We turned right onto Highway 46 and continued four miles to the place where Chuck had crossed it. We pulled over and I got out to take a reading with the Walston receiver. After unfolding the Christmas-tree-like Yagi antenna, I turned on the power. *CHIRP... CHIRP... CHIRP*. The signal-strength indicator's entire row of ten tiny lights glowed cherry red. My heart sang along to the cheerful song that was so strong, so clear; the model had to be less than a hundred yards away. It couldn't possibly have gone as far as Chuck had said, past the next major road, Highway 33. I couldn't believe my spectacularly good luck. No doubt, we'd find #18 in a few minutes and be on our way.

"That's strange," Chuck said, standing next to me. "I know it went a lot farther than this."

"What can I say?" I replied. "Well, it's so close, we can't get any directionality. Let's drive on a little ways and take another reading."

A car rushed by, just feet in front of us, tugging at us with its wake. Out of pure reflex, we stepped back from the roadway, closer to the wild field behind us, and I began folding the antenna. Suddenly, I shuddered. From the darkness of that field, an unseen man's voice called out, "Hey there!" I spun around to face the intruder.

“Oh, hello, Aram,” I said, when Aram Schlossberg of New York emerged on foot from the tall vegetation. He was lugging his model-tracking receiver.

“So you’re looking for a lost model, too?” he said.

“Yeah. It never DT’d in the seven-minute round.” As I spoke, something behind him, way out on the horizon, stole my attention. “Look!” I gasped.

“What is it?” he answered. “I don’t see anything.”

“Look very carefully, right...over...*there*.” I was now standing close to him, pointing. “It’s very faint. And so weird.”

The full moon had just risen. Unlike any I’d ever seen. The dense smoke layer on the horizon had transformed it into a surreal, dark-purple orb—a mysterious and haunting grape-colored eye peering out of the void. Had it not been for the velvet-black of the desert sky around it, it would have been nearly impossible to see.

“That *is* strange,” Aram said, shrugging and returning to his search.

“Halloween’s not far off,” I muttered, transfixed on the eerie apparition. “It’s like the moon’s own ghost. Weird.” A shiver went up my back.

Back at the car, I pointed it out to Murph and Chuck. Then we drove about a quarter mile and pulled over beneath a solitary streetlamp. I got out and turned on the receiver. *CHIRP... CHIRP... CHIRP*. All ten red lights pulsing, no matter what direction I pointed the antenna. This just couldn’t be. The signal was just as strong as it had been before. “Something’s wrong,” I mumbled.

“I think you’re right,” Chuck said as the chirping continued to taunt us.

“Wait a minute. When you packed up your model in the car, did you take out the transmitter?”

“No,” he said. “But there’s so little chance we’re on the same frequency.”

He pulled his model’s fuselage from the back of the minivan, removed the Walston transmitter, and popped out one of its

batteries. The chirping fell silent. We stared at each other like we’d just sat on a whoopee cushion during a meeting of corporate executives. “Dang,” I said. My cocky sense of good luck had just been shattered. Shaking my head, I continued, “Oh well, let’s drive over to Highway 33, where you lost sight of the glider.”

We backtracked to a road with the agriculturally evocative name, “Brown Material Road.” Turning right on to Highway 33, we headed northwest to the place where Chuck had bid farewell to #18. When we got there, the dark, swaying shadows of a dense pistachio orchard loomed before us. I unfolded the Walston’s antenna, pointed it in the direction Chuck indicated, and turned on the receiver. Only the grating sound of static filled the air. The little red lights on the display fidgeted a moment and then turned dark. Nothing. I slowly moved the antenna a bit to the right, a bit to the left. I tried a little farther each direction. Then, remarkably, the two lights on the lowest end of the scale saw-sawed feebly, accompanied by the faint, distorted hint of soft chirps not quite buried in the electronic “white noise.” Was it just my imagination, wishful thinking, or a “ghost signal” that really meant nothing? I had been fooled by all three before.

I studied the two barely quavering lights. “I may have something,” I whispered. “...I think...I hope...”

“Here, try this,” Chuck said softly. “Turn down the gain so just the first light comes on and off. If it pulses at the correct rate, it’s probably legitimate.”

I did as he said. A minute later, I smiled at him. “It’s very, very weak, but I’m ready to believe it. This is our direction.” I pointed with the antenna, then pulled out a magnetic compass. Now our chase line had a numerical direction, something precise, almost tangible. If we were right, we now had a sort of imaginary string connecting us to my far-away glider. All we had to do was follow it, pulling ourselves forward along it, probably for miles, through the eerie darkness of a remote, nearly unpopulated piece of

California desert—until we reached the glider at the other end. But the apparent simplicity of the plan was deceptive. We couldn't really follow the imaginary string directly, but had to fumble around, zig-zagging and leap-frogging on whatever network of roads was out there, hoping with each wandering step to get closer and closer to the lost model. This wasn't going to be quick or easy. A glance back to the east confirmed that the surreal purple moon was still watching, stalking us.

Opening the car doors, we found that Murph had moved up front to the driver's seat. He was fidgeting with the dash-top GPS receiver he had brought from home. The one I was so sure would be just so much dead weight. "I just loaded the navigation data for this local area," he said. "Look at this." He turned the display a little so we could see better. "It even shows the little oil-well access roads, every little two-track trail—everything."

I nearly choked. "Murph, you're a genius! A certifiable genius."

Now we could plan each step in the zig-zag search with some intelligence. With Murph's and Chuck's brainpower and that faint little signal on the Walston, I felt a surge of confidence that we would bring #18 back alive. *Come and get me*, the glider was saying in the barely discernible chirps. *It's a treasure hunt. Come and get me.*

It suddenly dawned on me that I was taking advantage of my buddies. It had been a long, eventful day for all of us, and maybe it was time to cut them some slack. "Guys," I said uncertainly, "We *could* come back tomorrow and find it in the daylight. It'll be a lot easier on everybody."

Chuck shook his head. "No. We're on it; let's finish the job."

Murph beamed. "Let's go get that glider. Besides, if the wind comes up tonight, the model's going to tumble on the ground and get busted."

He moved over to the front passenger's seat, Chuck took a middle-row seat, and I slid in behind the wheel.

"There's our chase line," Murph said, sliding a finger along the GPS display. "Let's take this road over to this point..." He tapped the display. "...Then take a right on that unimproved road over to...here. That'll take us about a half mile farther along in the right direction. We can take another Walston reading there."

"OK," I said. "Number 18, wherever you are out there, we're on our way." I put the minivan in gear and we set off, toward the gloomy hulks of some nearby rolling hills. As we drove, I marveled at the wonderful example of friendship and teamwork I was witnessing.

Soon we left the pavement. To refer to what came next as "unimproved roads" was charitable. They were equal parts powdery dust, twisting ruts, and shards of loose gravel. The headlights swung sharply back and forth as we climbed into the hilly tumbleweed forest.

We stopped once again for a radio-tracker reading. The Walston signal was a little stronger—the third light on the row of ten was now blinking. "Yeah," I muttered to Chuck, who smiled in reply. We made an adjustment in our search direction, then got back into the car again. Murph choreographed our next sequence of steps in the treasure hunt. This set would take us to an oil well.

"See it?" Murph said, pointing out the windshield. "Over there." Uphill, far in the distance, a large cylinder floating in the blackness glowed a warm yellow. An oil storage tank—the location of the well.

The path was even more convoluted than the last one, and I made a wrong turn. Murph and the GPS quickly corrected us. We bumped along, the inside of the car glowing from the dashboard lights and the map display Murph was glued to. It felt as if we were in a tiny boat plying a darkened sea of dusty tumbleweeds.

Minutes later, we turned onto the short, curving access road to the oil tank, which sat perched on a small hill. We pulled up next to the chain-link fence enclosing the tank and the well's hulking black rocking-horse pump.

Outside the car, the cool night air felt good after the heat-soaking we'd taken during the contest. The buzzing overhead light glared down at us. I unfolded the Walston antenna, and hooked it to the receiver as the rocking horse's electric motor hummed, the huge mechanical animal relentless in its task, stoic and oblivious to us and to the unsettling smell of the distant forest fire.

The receiver's fourth light was now pulsing in step with a clear, insistent *CHIRP... CHIRP... CHIRP*. We were on the right track, following the invisible string to #18. But the rocking horse brought a new worry. We were now in oil country. From our hilltop vantage point, we could see other pumps and tanks. Could it be that #18 had landed on or near one of them? Might it be behind a locked chain-link fence? I put the Walston away, and chanced a glance at the moon. It had risen above the smoke layers and blossomed into a brilliant white disk.

Murph led us through a few more sequences of obscure roads and tracks. Without the GPS, we'd have become hopelessly disoriented and lost.

I sighed with relief when we cleared the oil fields and the red Walston lights said "keep going." The final stop was near the bottom of a long, steep slope on an isolated dirt road. It was past 9:30 and we'd been up since before six that morning. This time, eight of the ten Walston lights were dancing and the chirping was loud. Number 18 was probably no more than half a mile out there in the wasteland. *Come and get me! Come and get me!* But Murph had bad news—the roads couldn't take us any closer. It was time for a nighttime hike.

Chuck and I prepared for the trek. Murph would stay in the car and be our home base and lighthouse. If we didn't return soon, he would occasionally honk the horn and flash the lights to guide us back. I grabbed the Walston and a flashlight. I was dressed in a sweat suit and running shoes. Chuck had on jeans, a long-sleeve tee-shirt, and running shoes. Not exactly the kind of hiking gear appropriate to the thick sticker bushes,

tumbleweeds, and rough terrain. Furthermore, we'd be encroaching on the domain of rattlesnakes and tarantulas.

We worked our way through a tumbleweed-choked barbed wire fence and set off into the night, where the glaring moonlight transformed us into lanky moonshadows flowing over the uneven ground. There was no path; just hills, weeds, and the invisible line. I pointed the opened antenna as we walked, and kept the receiver turned on so I could continually refine our direction of travel. Up and down the hills we walked, occasionally stepping into unseen holes, each time cringing and hoping it wouldn't produce a sprained ankle—or a snake bite. The car was no longer in sight, and for a frightening moment, I wondered if we could find our way back to it. I had my cell phone, but out here there was no coverage. I brushed these thoughts aside and concentrated on the Walston's tiny red lights. Nine of them now. We were within a few hundred yards. I swung the flashlight back and forth. Nothing but weeds.

Our legs aching, we started up the daunting slope of a big round hill. My exhausted mind began to play back scenes from the day's emotional roller-coaster. I saw again Alex Andriukov's F1B model not quite crushed under my motorcycle's tire. I relived the sublime excitement of advancing to the second flyoff round and the mild disappointment of not making it into the final round the next morning. The scare when Aram Schlosberg appeared out of the tumbleweeds. The ever-present hint of smoke. The purple moon.

It was obvious now: #18 had flown much longer than the required seven minutes—probably over an hour. Nevertheless, the official score would stand at 6 minutes and 12 seconds. But we had done well anyway, Murph and Chuck and I. And now we were closing in on the lost glider—a far bigger prize than winning the contest would have been.

We paused near the top of the hill. The bright moonlight revealed ground mostly

devoid of tumbleweeds. The dry grass was short and sparse.

As we crested the hill, all ten lights pulsed bright red and the raucous chirping could be heard a hundred yards away. No matter what direction I pointed the antenna, the signal was maxed out. We *had* to be almost on top of #18. Several scans with the flashlight showed nothing. I turned on the radio's attenuator, to intentionally weaken the signal. We were now engaged in the final, "short-range" search. With the attenuator on, only five red lights showed. I slowly pivoted around, swinging the antenna in a full arc, seeking the last short length of the invisible string. At first nothing happened. But then, the signal strength rose to eight lights. I continued swinging the antenna. The display dropped back to five lights. I rotated back in the other direction. Eight lights again. *All right. I have the direction.*

I slowly walked about twenty five yards. Something on the ground briefly glistened. The merest glimmer. I froze and aimed the flashlight. Number 18 lay serenely on the ground before me; wings level, as if still in flight. The glistening had been the moonlight playing on the shiny mylar-film covering of the horizontal tail.

Something seemed strange about the model. The thought rang again in my head—*it looks like it's still flying*. With a shock, I realized why—the tail was still pulled down firmly in the glide setting, not in the full-upward, dethermalized position. It had never DT'd, just as Chuck had opined two hours before, when he'd motorcycled back to the flight line. It wasn't really unexpected—#18 had flown much too far to have been DT'd, even if it had been in the strongest of mid-day thermals. But seeing it lying there that way was unnerving.

I called to Chuck and bent to pick up the glider. Opening the fuselage hatch, I trained the light on the mechanical innards. The DT timer had wound all the way down like it was supposed to, but the DT arm was locked in the center of the scroll. When preparing for the second flyoff round, I had erred in setting the timer. Having never previously qualified

for a flyoff flight as long as seven minutes, I had mistakenly placed the DT arm one groove too far toward the center. An error of less than a sixteenth of an inch, but enough to prevent dethermalizing. A clear-cut case of pilot error. Another whoopee-cushion moment for me.

As Murph's GPS would later show, old #18 had flown almost exactly 10 miles, over desert, pistachio orchards, highways, oil fields, tumbleweeds, snakes and spiders, to gently come to rest on this smooth, now windless hilltop. It had called us to itself in the dark, with the tiny radio transmitter inside its fuselage laying out the invisible string. *Come and get me*. And we did. By the moonlight, I checked my wristwatch. It was 10:00.

Chuck and I were giddy as we started our final task—finding our way back to the minivan. Using the moon as our reference, we started downhill in the general direction. Suddenly free of the stress of the search, my mind began to consider other things. Holding the glider in one hand and the flashlight in the other, I asked Chuck, "Is it true that rattlesnakes are nocturnal?"

"Yes, they are," he replied in his laconic way.

My pulse raced a little. "And is it true they're attracted to lights?"

"Yes, I think that's right."

"Hey, this model's getting pretty heavy. Would you mind carrying the flashlight?"

His grin glowed in the moonlight. "Yeah, right, the glider weighs what, less than a pound? Nice try." We both laughed.

Fifteen minutes later, Murph saw us in the moonlit distance and flashed the headlights. We were home free.

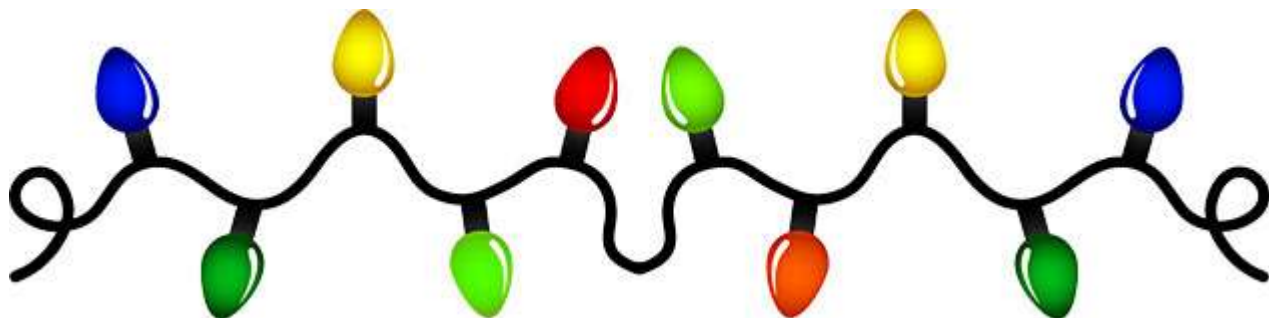
We stopped at the Carl's Junior in Lost Hills for a quick dinner. We were too tired to say much while eating. Back at the Day's Inn, we slept peacefully that night. We elected not to go to the flying field the next morning to watch the early ten-minute flyoff which would crown Vasi Beschasy as F1A glider champion of the 2006 Livotto International contest. I thought about it wistfully when I

awoke, but then I opened my model box and saw good old #18 snug and secure inside, and felt happy. And very grateful for my generous and skillful friends, Murph and Chuck. *What phenomenal teamwork*, I said over and over. I closed the box and got showered and dressed. There was more practicing to be done before the Finals, which were just three days away.

As I stepped out of my hotel room into a new day, I felt certain that if I were given a dozen lifetimes, I could never forget the experiences of that dry, dusty, smoke-scented Livotto contest. Nor the wild nighttime chase for #18, and the strange purple moon—the only one I've ever seen.



Happy Holidays!



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