

LSF Level 5 Achievement

by Edwin Wilson
Louisville, Kentucky

In the last Louisville Area Soaring Society (LASS) newsletter, I wrote about my failed attempt to complete my last LSF task, a non-stop eight-hour flight. It was my story about how after 6 hours and 15 minutes, into my 8-hour flight at Brookville Dam, the receiver in the plane chose that moment to die and the Paragon wound up in the lake. That same weekend six other pilots did complete their 8-hour flights at Brookville Dam. Rob Glover from Alabama was one of those pilots. Rob completed his eight-hour flight to finish all his Level 5 requirements, and thus became the 100th person in the world to complete the required task needed to achieve Level 5 status.

I was disappointed I did not complete my 8-hour flight in October, but I took solace it was not something I did, but rather a mechanical problem. After 18 years waiting to complete my Level 5 task, I found I was more determined than ever before to complete this one task. I always knew I could do it. I just needed the right combination of weather and witnesses. With new determination, I started a daily relationship with the Weather Channel. Meantime I pulled out my 18-year-old Sagitta 1100 to prepare it for another attempt. I just hoped the weather would cooperate and give me another chance before the end of the year.

Ironically, this Sagitta was scratch built during the winter of 81-82. This is the same year I completed all the requirements for Level 5 status with the exception of the eight-hour slope flight. Most of my Level 5 contest wins were done with this plane. Michael, my son, has used this same plane to win Mid-South and Nat's trophies. More recently, I brought it out of semi retirement in time to fly it at the 99 Nat's, where I placed third in three-function class.

The week of November 15 started out with a large weather high sitting in the great planes, but what caught my interest was an even larger high right behind it. I watched the isobars between the two highs compact together and they were projected to move directly to the east. The weather was going to give me the opportunity I needed. Now I had to try and figure out what day it would pass through our area. By Wednesday I was pretty sure my window of weather opportunity was going to be on Friday, only. Rats! A work day. Could I find witnesses?

I had been foiled years earlier when I could not get enough qualified witnesses to legalize an eight-hour attempt. I got nervous thinking this might happen again. After several fruitless phone calls and e-mails, I finally got in touch with Don Harris who lives near Columbus, Ohio. I have known Don for many years now, and he is one of only two people to complete the entire LSF task requirements, TWICE! Don said he would be glad to be a witness and would make some phone calls to see if he could find a second person to be a witness. An hour later I was set as Don had found another witness and they would meet me at the Brookville MacDonalds Friday morning.

On the road at 5:00 AM, I met Don and Bruce Herider from Dayton, Ohio at MacDonalds. Arriving at the dam a little later I wondered, "*Where was the predicted wind that had been forecast?*" I went ahead and began assembling the Sagitta. By 8:15, I was ready to launch. There still was not enough wind, but I launched to check the trim both in the plane and in my stomach. Down the dam face and back it flew, only to land near the launch spot. This was repeated again. *Where's the wind?*

A few minutes later, I finally felt a small puff of wind and launched again. This time the Sagitta went down the dam and returned with no loss of altitude. We turned and did it again, and again, and again. The plane was flying at eye level and it wouldn't go any higher. I trimmed the plane for minimum sink and milked every puff of air I could get. A half-hour passed and the wind picked up slightly. I was doing a little better, but the wind dropped off every once in a while. I could not relax. I only had so much daylight to finish in. It was already too late to land and start over; darkness would catch me before I could finish. This is it. Do it or else.

An hour later the Sagitta is now trimmed to best LD and not minimum sink mode. The wind keeps building and I can now fly above the dam height and more out in front. There are still holes in the wind that threaten to drop the plane out of the air. They seem to time themselves to come along every time I try to relax. I move to the back edge of the dam to stay out of the worst of the wind, but once or twice an hour I am back at the front lip scrambling to keep the Sagitta flying as the wind has its way with the plane.

By noon I am in trouble - the wind is still increasing. The Sagitta now needs ballast in a bad way. The wind continues to increase. We clock a gust at the dam lip reaching 40+ mph in the middle of the afternoon. One time a gust grabs the

Sagitta and flips it backward over the top of the dam in a giant loop. Now the Sagitta is in no man's land behind the dam. It's back where the Paragon died. It's back where the rotor monster lives, just looking for helpless planes to pluck their wings off and devour the remains. I dive as hard as I dare clearing the guardrail by only a foot as I run for smoother air down below the dam lip. I have come too far to let the wind get me now.

The wind is now so strong the Sagitta will no longer penetrate straight into it. Time to try something else. Turning parallel to the dam I dive the Sagitta well below the dam lip to gain speed. When I think it has enough speed I turn it into the wind trying to fly into the strength of the wind to find the lift zone. When I hit the lift the Sagitta jumps straight up 150 – 200 feet in one or two seconds. The rate of climb is unreal. Before I lose all forward motion, I turn the Sagitta down the dam face in another dive only to repeat the zoom climb again. This was repeated over and over again for almost three hours and is the only way I could cope with the ever-increasing winds.

Finally it's 4:31pm; the Sagitta and I have survived the full eight hours, and now it is time to land. I made one pass up the dam face and could not bleed off enough speed to land safely. I am tired and my mind and reflexes have slowed down some. This landing thing will be hard. Diving again to the bottom of the dam, I set up for a second attempt. This time I pulled some high G circles to bleed off some of the excess speed. Turning straight into the dam I pulled up on the elevator and, with the strong tailwind, rode from the bottom of the dam clear to the top hanging only a foot or so off the grass. Full down elevator drove the Sagitta's nose into the grass about 5 feet from the top guardrail.

It was over. Pictures and congratulations were passed around and then it started to rain. But I did not care. I was numb. It took a couple of days for the realization of what I did to sink in. I can not say enough for what Don and Bruce did that day. Not only did they serve as official timers, they both watched over me to make sure my mind did not wander. They were truly my support, my co-pilots the entire day. In retrospect this was the most difficult flying I have ever done in all the years I have flown models. The weather worked against me all day. Unlike the October attempt when we could sit, relax, and fly, I was never able to relax all day. I was emotionally drained while driving home that night, but I have to tell you after waiting eighteen years it feels good to be able to say I did it. Besides, now I can say I am the 101st person to complete all the LSF requirements for Level 5. The last one this millennium. ■