

MUSTANG SOLO!

By Jack Cox

WITH ALL THE aviation records that have been set down through the years plus the "firsts" claimed for every conceivable thing relating to airplanes and flying one can imagine, it becomes increasingly difficult to get one's name in the record books. 16 year old Dirk Leeward of Ocala, Florida has managed to find a way, however . . . he made his initial solo in an unlimited racer — a souped up, clipwing P-51 Mustang!

Dirk, who serves as crew chief for his father, Jimmy Leeward, at Reno, Homestead and wherever else the Cloud Dancer appears, has been flying since he was 5 weeks old — his first ride was in a DC-3. His father had him taking the controls at 3 and by the time he was 10 could fly instruments with ease — he had to, because he couldn't see over the panel! By age 12, Dirk was flying take-off to touch down in King Airs, Navajoes, etc. and by 14 was fully qualified in instrument flying . . . except, of course, for having a license. Also at 14, he worked on his own in ground school and passed his Private written. More recently he has passed his commercial and instrument writtens but has to wait until he is old enough to take the flight tests.

The big day for solo came on Sunday, September 2, 1979. After church, the Leeward family drove to the Ocala Municipal Airport and pulled out their sport aircraft — a J-3, T-6 and the 51. They were joined by the Denny Sherman family, close friends from North Palm Beach who brought their beautiful Stearman up for the occasion. Without ceremony, Dirk calmly strapped in, fired up the Merlin, listened to his father's rather nervous last minute instructions, taxied out and took off. Not only did he do a beautiful job with the airplane, he also made two screaming passes just to show ol' dad that he doesn't plan to be a crew chief FOREVER!

After a grease job landing in the 51, Dirk wasted little time switching to the T-6 for his second solo . . . and still later to the J-3. And after watching his performance in these aircraft, Denny Sherman decided he might as well add the Stearman to his list. Dirk was given two touch and goes and was sent off solo in the stiff-legged ol' biplane.

After Dirk endured the traditional snipping of his shirt tail, the Leewards and Shermans drove to the Leeward home for lunch and an appropriate celebration . . . after which they returned to the airport and spent the afternoon flying all the airplanes!

Dirk Leeward (EAA 114957) is a senior at Forest High in Ocala, Florida. He is a member of the National Honor Society and is president of the Key Club . . . just to prove that his head is not in the clouds ALL the time. His father considers him an excellent mechanic and depends on him to keep the Mustang in top racing tune. Dirk, incidentally, was maintaining a family tradition of sorts with his unusual first solo — Jimmy made his first flight at age 16 in a Bamboo Bomber.



From a Mustang to a J-3 . . . instead of the other, traditional, way around.



Dirk Leeward on take-off on his initial solo . . . in a clipwing Mustang!



Dirk gets the full treatment — a dunking and . . .



. . . a shirt tail trimming!



That's Dirk . . . in father Jimmy Leeward's racer, "Cloud Dancer." The airplane was flown in the forthcoming movie of the same name.



The shirt tail says it all.



Janet Helton on her 16th birthday.

SOLO RECORDS

Dirk Leeward's initial solo in an unlimited racer is certainly an aviation first . . . and it brings to mind a couple of others. As far as we are able to determine here at EAA Headquarters, the all-time record for the **number** of aircraft soloed on a pilot's 16th birthday is held by Terry Boehler (EAA 41115) of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Almost 10 years ago he soloed an astounding 52 airplanes between sunup and sunset! The first one was a homebuilt twin, built from the wreckage of the old Langley Twin.

The female record is held by Janet Helton of Los Angeles who soloed 36 aircraft on her 16th birthday — June 29, 1978. Her initial solo was in Jim Osborne's 260 hp Acroduster Too and later included a hot air balloon, 5 gliders and 30 aircraft . . . one of which was her father's Pitts Special! Janet was recently featured on the TV program **Razzmatazz**.



(Photo by Lee Fray)
OSHKOSH '79 MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE — Front row, left to right, Chris Barton and Sue Bushey. Standing, left to right, Martha Heuer, Sharon Poberzny, Carol Blake and Sue Dooley.



(Photo by Lee Fray)
1979 OSHKOSH SWEEPSTAKES COMMITTEE — Kneeling, left to right, Bret Davis, Gene Selchow, Bob Gyllenswan and Det Ansinn, Jr. Back row, left to right, Barb McGehee, Ollie McGehee, Jim Cook, Glenn Rosenke, Det Ansinn, Tom Janusevic and Judy Janusevic.



(Photo by Lee Fray)
Oshkosh '79 International Visitors Tent Committee — Left to right, Theresa Prescott, Jan Christie, Dave Jameson, Agnes Larson, Erika Dimpfl and Catalina Ballesteros. Kneeling, Barbro Whiting and Nancy Martini.