



BALLOONISTS PREPARE FOR LAUNCHING AT PATTERSON PARK

... Rain-soaked race ended 20 minutes later at the edge of Clifton Park.

—News American Photo by John Davis.

Pilot's Balloon Battle Plan Results In Hot Air Victory

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By **RICHARD IRWIN**
Staff Reporter

If Gary Lewis, a 38-year-old pilot for Eastern Airlines and a former Marine who served 13 months in Vietnam as a forward air controller, ever decides to enter another profession he might try predicting the future.

Lewis, a resident of Warren, N.J., and a balloonist for more than 18 months, was among seven entrants in Saturday's Great Baltimore Balloon Race from Patterson Park.

Long before the first balloon took off in a hare-and-hounds race, Lewis predicted his balloon, sponsored by the First National Bank of Maryland, would win.

"In a race like this," Lewis said, "it's best to take off last because its easier to gauge your distance from the 'hare' and once the others have landed you make a greater effort to come closest to the target balloon."

Lewis' battle plan came off without a hitch.

Airborne only 10 minutes and flying at about 1,000 feet we quickly spotted the

"hare." It was down in a ball field near Clifton High School off to the northeast and hidden by a large group of trees.

"We have a good chance," Lewis told me and Bob Glaser, a member of the Baltimore Amateur Radio Club, "because two balloons are becalmed and the others have apparently landed far from the 'hare.'"

With delicate touches on the fuel control knobs, Lewis directed the 70-foot high multi-colored balloon towards the "hare" balloon sponsored by WMAR-TV and the Sunpapers.

"I knew we'd win," he shouted above the blast of the propane entering the canopy.

When he won the balloon race at the Kentucky Derby, Lewis used the same technique, beating out 30 other entrants and it proved successful again.

With victory in sight, Glaser and I were oblivious to the possibility of hitting the railroad wires that loomed ahead of us just east of Clifton Park Elementary School. Instead, we were keeping one eye on the opposition and the other on the "hare," hoping to get closer.

Soaked to the skin but gloriously hap-

py about winning, Lewis, Glaser and myself scrambled out of the balloon and were quickly surrounded by four policemen and several kids carrying umbrellas.

"We'll break out the champagne and celebrate after we get the balloon and canopy packed away," Lewis said.

That was the hardest part of the flight. Weighing over 600 pounds, the saturated balloon was a tough baby to handle but we finally managed to stuff it into a canvas bag.

A city chase truck drove Lewis, his canopy and basket back to Patterson Park while Carroll McKenna of Moravia Road, a bystander who assisted us, drove Glaser and me to the starting point and our cars.

Back at the park, Lewis retrieved two bottles of the bubbly, broke out several plastic cups and toasted the victory balloon.

"I knew we'd do it, I knew we'd win all the time," Lewis shouted as a few on-lookers stared and wondered why anyone in his right mind would fly a balloon.

"Why?" asked a member of the winning crew.

"Because its there," he replied.

Reporter Conquers Elements, Fear To Win Balloon Battle

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By **RICHARD IRWIN**
Staff Aeronaut

The Great Baltimore Balloon Race, dampened by the rain and forced off course by northerly winds, ended near Clifton Park Saturday, miles from the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay that was to have been its destination.

The winning balloon was the one in which I rode. Sponsored by the First National Bank, it bumped down on the Clifton Park Elementary School baseball diamond at 8:55 a.m.

In the hare-and-hounds race, victory was not to the swift but to the team that landed nearest the red-white-and-blue "hare" balloon, sponsored by WMAR-TV and the Sunpapers, which was the

first one off the ground at our Patterson Park starting point.

Placing second was the Hausner's Restaurant balloon piloted by Harry Repak of Mt. Kisco, N.Y., and third was the black-topped balloon sponsored by Hess Shoes and Famolare, whose pilot was Paul Tychsen of Falls Church, Va.

Though we were the last off the ground, our rainbow-colored balloon, piloted by Gary Lewis of Warren, N.J., landed within a quarter-mile of the hare balloon that we were chasing.

We had risen to 1,000 feet when suddenly I spotted the WMAR balloon behind some trees on a field at Clifton Park High School.

Lewis, who is an Eastern Airlines pilot, had been barking out directions to

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Ancient Hot Air Balloon Gains Popularity In World Of Speed

By ROBIN And
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Hearst News Service

THE DELLS, Wis.—In a world obsessed with speed, it is something of a surprise to learn that a small but growing band of intrepid aeronauts has reverted to the slowest of all modes of air travel: the ancient hot air balloon.

We made the discovery here at this popular Wisconsin resort community, where 50 balloonists and their ground crews competed in the annual Midwest Balloon Rally to gain points which will qualify them for the national championships in August at Indianola, Iowa, and the international meet at York, England, in September.

They came from as far as California and Texas with their huge gaily painted bags to risk their necks and expensive equipment for absolutely nothing but the enjoyment of floating through the air at the whim of the winds.

Ironically, a number of them are working members of the jet scene, such as air line captains and test pilots, who find relief from the strains of their high velocity jobs in the quiet contrast of drifting in balloons.

As one veteran commercial pilot put it to us, "There is nothing that removes the tensions of modern existence like a balloon ride. It seems strange to say, but the most exciting part of it is that there is a complete absence of all sound.

"You are always moving with the wind and never against it, so you just don't hear any noise, except when you turn on the blower to heat the air for more altitude. The rest of the time you feel like a disembodied spirit soaring over the world."

These hot air balloons are just that, depending entirely for buoyancy on air that is heated by propane gas. Except for the propane, they differ not at all from the original bal-

lons first developed in 1784 by the Frenchman, Montgolfier, and heated his air by placing the bag high over a fire.

Their meager instrument panel contains only an altimeter to show height, a variometer to show whether the bag is rising or falling, a compass, and a pyrometer which measures heat of the fabric at the top of the bag.

One other essential arti-

cle is traditional for all hot air flyers. This is a bottle of wine, preferably the best of champagnes. The custom goes back to those early days in France, when the freely drifting craft often landed on farms and terrified the stock, as once in a while they still do.

Most of the farmers are equally terrified by the weird invaders from space, but some of the more courageous at-

tacked the balloons with pitchforks and it became a primary safety measure for the aeronauts to jump from the gondola immediately upon landing and pacify them with wine.

The Balloon Federation of America, which governs the sport with a strict set of rules, now numbers more than 5,000 members. The federal government examines and licenses them and requires an FAA certification before they

are permitted to compete. Though the great nylon bags cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and the ground crews run into considerable money, the sport is growing so fast there is a waiting list for licenses.

There are two main events here at The Dells. In one the entrants take off from six different points at least five miles away and attempt to fly over one designated target. They drop weighted streamers at the marker and the closest one wins.

In the other they revise the action, taking off from one central point and dropping their streamers at six different pre-selected targets at least five miles away. Speed is not a factor as points are scored only for accuracy. Each balloonist must carry an FAA observer to insure that all rules are obeyed.

A contest I observed fell in the second category. While a crowd estimated by police at 15,000 plus watched from nearby hills, tops of cars, rooftops and other vantage spots, the aeronauts spread their enormous bags over the open field from which they started.

At a signal from balloonmeister Tom Sheppard, an ex-English Royal Navy jet fighter pilot, they began the inflation process, using an electric fan to force air into the bag, where it is slowly heated by blasts of propane.

Another signal directed them to cast off and commence ascending. The spectacle is unforgettable, as 50 eye-catching 90 foot bags take to the sky in the soft breeze, bumping each other harmlessly as they vie for space to climb. Soon they headed south in the late afternoon sun, bound to their targets.

Here is where their skills come into play. Using a mixture of information from the altimeter, the variometer and their own knowledge of wind flows, they must determine at which altitude the air is blowing in the direction of their goals.

Fearless Reporter Wins In Great Balloon Race

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me and Robert Glaser of the Baltimore Amateur Radio Club, who was riding with us, almost from the moment we lifted off the ground.

Maneuvering the balloon by periodically firing up the propane heater that was sending jets of hot air into the huge nylon bag above us, our pilot was able to get us closer and closer to the Clifton Park school.

Suddenly, he warned us to brace for landing and we began dropping at 150 feet a minute toward the rain-soaked grass below.

We were rocked by a hard bump as the balloon gondola struck the ground. We held on to the gondola and the superstructure and were dragged along the ground. Reaching up, Lewis pulled a rope that spilled the remaining air from the balloon—and the ride was over.

I was a little disappointed at the shortness of our 20-minute ride (which covered two miles) but I was thankful that, though soaked to the skin, we had landed safely.

On the ground, six-story hot air balloons are as awkward and ungainly as elephants. But, lacking the elephant's solidity, the slightest breeze has absolute control over them and makes them sway back and forth alarmingly.

Once the ropes that bind them to earth drop away, however, the ungainly multi-colored globes are among the most graceful of lighter-than-air objects.

Stepping into our balloon as the Great Baltimore Balloon Race began this morning at 8:35 a.m., I had a sinking feeling in my stomach, which told me to fake sickness and call this mad act off. But when a reporter's family is looking on and his city editor wants a story, it's

very difficult to chicken out.

One by one each of the seven balloons gracefully lifted off into the cloud-choked morning sky above east Baltimore, searching unsuccessfully for a breeze that would carry them eastward above the rooftops and church spires of the city.

The Patterson Park stragglers who turned out to see the lift-off disappeared very quickly as the balloon gained altitude above the telephone wires and majestic trees filling the park.

Soon the city streets, dirty and full of cracks, appeared neat and straight and unblemished from my view high in the air.

At 1,000 feet cars look like toys and one realizes that nearly all the city's roofs are covered with tarpaper. Looking around, trying to get my bearings in the rain, I could see Towson and Loch Raven far to the north.

Glaser, our radio operator, was sending the details of our flight to Vern Chapin, another radio club member, at *The News American*.

As we had planned our course, the tri-station television tower near Hampden was to have drifted away below us and the Francis Scott Key bridge over the Patapsco River would have appeared straight ahead.

Always climbing, the balloon would have missed the bridge by a great distance, and the great ships below would have seemed tiny in the overwhelming silence below.

Instead, we found ourselves in a rain-storm that filled the overhead canopy with water, made the balloon heavy and put us on the ground after our two-mile race.