

Matt Sheldon Achieves LSF Level V !!!

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By Mark Howard
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Matt Sheldon managed a two hour flight today to complete his LSF Level V certificate. Matt is the first Rocky Mountain Soaring Association (RMSA) member to reach level V and the second Colorado pilot to achieve this status. Matt flew a Sagitta X-C. Matt's flight was anything but boring. He made three attempts Sunday, after the annual club picnic. His first attempt broke the winch line. After getting the ship down safely, he launched again into marginal air. On this flight he got only one decent thermal, resulting in a 15 minute flight. His third launch did the trick. Matt ranged to the four corners of the compass in search of lift. The best thermals were found to the south and east of the sod farm - where the dirt has recently been graded and plowed. A northerly venture proved unwise. The sink almost did Matt in; but a push to the better air in the east spared him. Once he flew to the limits of visibility through sink the whole way. He knew if he turned around he'd be finished. Finally he hit a bubble, but he could only get a glimpse of the plane every now and then. Three additional pairs of eyes lent assistance. Shouts of, "Turn NOW!" could be heard across the plains. Fortunately, the bubble widened and eventually migrated closer to the sod farm. Everyone relaxed again, sat back, and breathed a sigh of relief! Matt laughed, "I could only see the plane once every two circles or so!" Matt got a cool drink and remarked that he thought the eight hour slope flight was easier! If it was not easier, it was probably more comfortable as temperatures now rose into the mid 90's. Several passing clouds made the temperature more tolerable, but caused concern about thermal conditions.

With about thirty-five minutes to go, Matt noticed that Phil Weigle was up in a thermal to the southwest that seemed promising. Matt tagged along and climbed up to the base of a passing "cumie". He thought the faint virga was a great sign. If he could manage to hold on under the cloud base, he'd have it made. He flew into the cloud several times - each time popping the spoilers on to lose altitude. Matt had a tough decision to make. He couldn't climb, because he'd lose the plane in the cloud. He couldn't move away from the lift, as he was blocked in on the right and, closer in, by a menacing (black) cloud; to the left was bright sky, which would provide no contrast to see the plane. He couldn't move away any farther out, either. If he started down, he might not make his time. While he pondered the choices, he constantly applied more and more spoiler, as he cut back and forth across the cloud that was moving him towards his goal, but at the same time taking a "death grip" on the plane. Full spoilers and still climbing - at the 1:57 mark - time to start down. Three diving passes back and forth and no noticeable descent! More DOWN! NO! That's TOO much! Pull UP! Finally she pulled out. She was OK - away from the killer cloud in normal air and VISIBLE! Several minutes later she was on the ground, safe after over two hours aloft.

So, on the first day after the summer solstice in the year 1997, Matt Sheldon achieved the goal of many years and joined a select fraternity of only a hundred special pilots.

Congratulations Matt! Well Done! ■