

High-flying Ionian soars way to National Hang Gliding meet

Hitting a golf ball, knocking down bowling pins, or camping in front of the teevee with a six-pack account for the recreation needs for many of us.

But when Rick Peterson of Ione wants to unwind, he jumps off a cliff wearing a kite.

But he does it well. So well, in fact, that in two weeks, he will travel to Pennsylvania to compete in the National Hang Gliding Championship. Peterson is the lone Oregonian to qualify for the nationals in his high-performance soaring division, and one of only six persons to represent four northwest states at the nationals.

Peterson became involved with hang gliding three years ago. "I was going to college in Pendleton, and I saw an ad on

a bulletin board for a hang gliding store that was opening. I'd seen a program on television about it, and thought I'd like to try it. So I was the first person at the store the day it opened," he recollected.

That same day, he took his first lesson, and the following day his first flight. "I thought it was something that I could be good at, so I really stuck with it," he said.

Prior to that time, the 21-year-old Ione man depended on motocross racing to satisfy his recreational interests. But his dirt bike just collected dust after he discovered the joy of flying.

"I guess it's mainly just the thrill that attracted me to hang gliding," he said. "No matter how many times I take off, I still get the adrenalin

pumping. It's a rush that stays with you all the time."

It's not hard to understand, when you hear about some of the flights he's taken in his rainbow colored Dragonfly model glider.

He's gone as high as 4,000 feet above the ground during one competition meet, making him feel "pretty small and excited, but not really scared. I could see cars at the landing area but not the people, and I was flying through pieces of clouds."

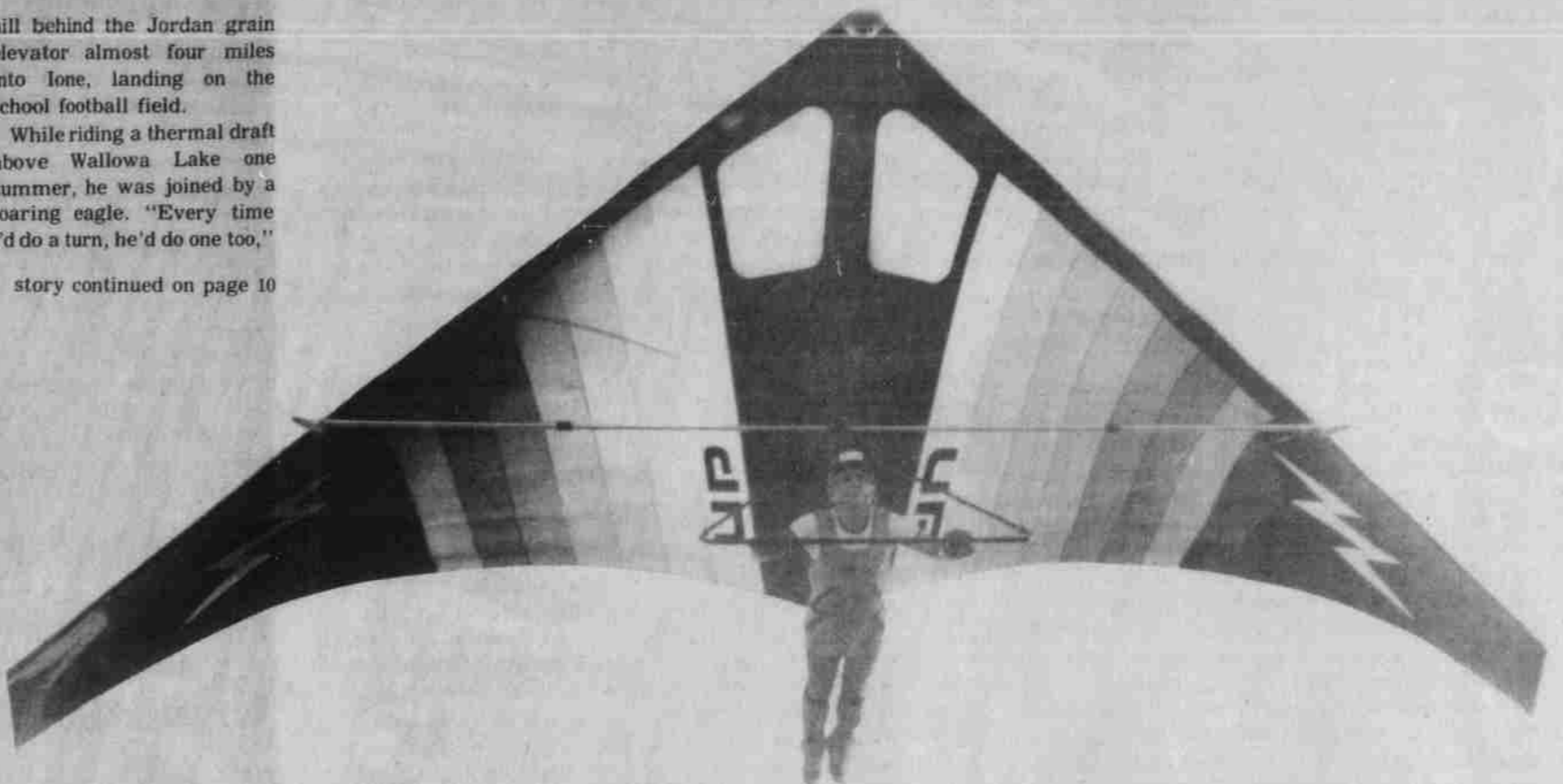
On another flight, thermal conditions allowed him to remain airborne for 2½ hours, giving him an eerie, but not unpleasant sensation of "not really noticing the glider at all. It seems like it's just you up there." His longest cross country flight was an estimated seven miles.

He has soared across the Columbia River and back near Biggs, and once flew from a

hill behind the Jordan grain elevator almost four miles into Ione, landing on the school football field.

While riding a thermal draft above Wallowa Lake one summer, he was joined by a soaring eagle. "Every time I'd do a turn, he'd do one too,"

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Ione aerialist Rick Peterson soars off top of butte near McNab in multicolored high performance kite in photo at right. Below, Peterson folds up glider after safe landing in pasture at Dick Sherer ranch, to return to the ridgetop again.

FIGURE SAVINGS

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