

TRIPOLI

Vegas

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December 1996

Turkey Shoot

by Brent McNeely

After being stuffed with Turkey over the Thanksgiving weekend, there is nothing better than a trip to Las Vegas for the Annual Turkey Shoot Rocket Launch. After a day of watching rockets shoot into the sky, you can check out the local casino entertainment, the bright lights of the strip, and perhaps catch sight of a sidewalk Elvis impersonator. I live here, so none of the local entertainment is interesting anymore, however, the Turkey Shoot, in my opinion, is one of the best entertainment events Las Vegas has to offer. This year was no exception.

The night before the launch the wind screamed outside our house and knocked down at least one tree in our neighborhood. As I loaded the Cherokee, the wind had died to a gusty breeze and I wondered if anyone would show for the launch. It was freezing cold outside (by Las Vegas standards). It must have been 40 degrees, meaning I would have to wear a coat—a rarity in Las Vegas.

We arrived at El Dorado dry lake bed at about 8:00. Several people had camped overnight in tents and motor homes. The launch control system was already set up, but the launch pads were not put together yet. We quickly assembled the pads and got them into place. After we got the P.A. system running, we announced that we were ready for the rockets. It was really cold and there was a stiff breeze which didn't help much. It wasn't until about 10:00 that the first person decided to send a rocket up.

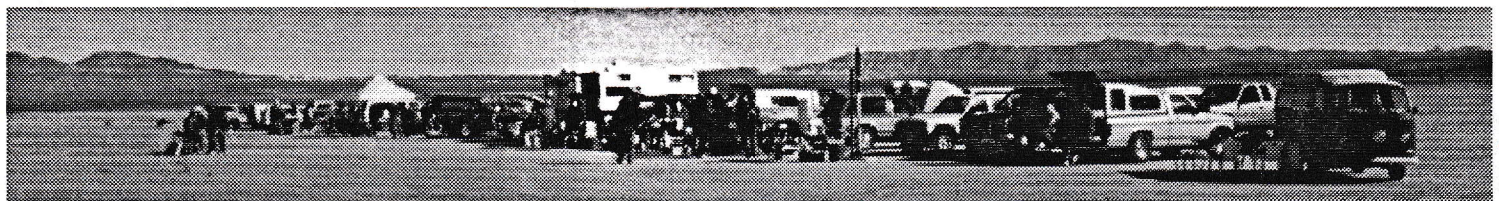
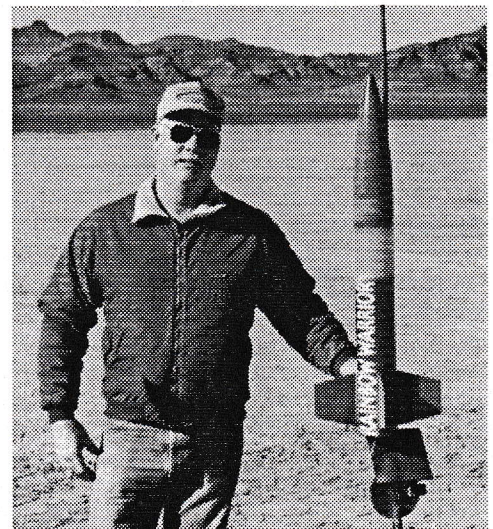
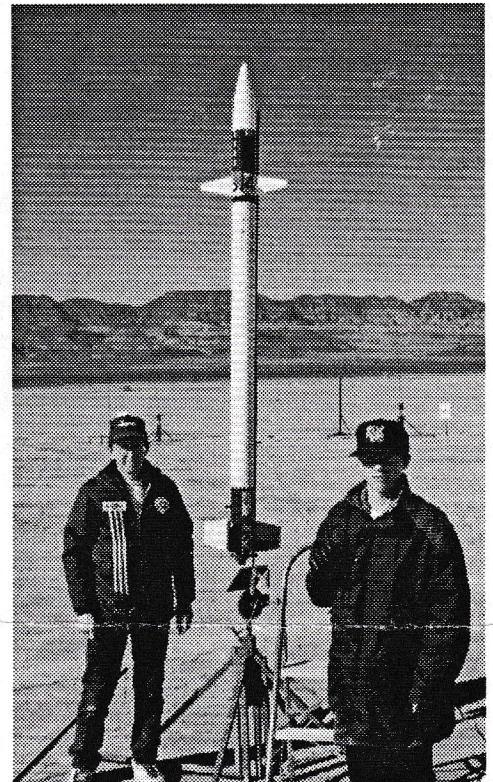
Dale Ainsworth claimed the first flight of the day. He put his Arcas up on a G64 for a great flight despite the stiff wind. He did have to hike a bit to recover the rocket, but his flight marked the beginning of 123

flights to come. Several others loaded up some medium sized rockets for good flights. Perhaps the first really interesting flight of the day was done by Steve Ainsworth with the perfect rocket for windy conditions: the VTS 3 (Vertical Trajectory System III). You might have read about Steve's gyro guided rocket in a past issue of HPR. Steve got his rocket off the pad with a J415 hybrid motor. The rocket went pretty much straight up for about 700 feet, then the gyros went to work, the rocket warbled a bit as the guidance fins corrected for wind. I must say it was fascinating to watch Steve's rocket at work against the winds.

A bunch of smaller rockets were launched until Steve Ainsworth stepped up to the pad again with another techno wonder rocket. This time he arranged for a drag race of smaller rockets against his custom camera rocket on a J275.

Steve and Brian recently developed a custom electronic circuit to take about a frame a second during the flight, triggered by a gravity switch at takeoff. Unfortunately all of the other rockets made it off the pad before Steve's rocket took to the air. And, if that wasn't disappointing enough, Steve's rocket went up and came right back down into the ground doing severe damage to the rocket. I suppose that Steve got the whole thing on film (if he was able to recover the camera intact).

Clint Campbell launched a nice looking S.A.M. rocket on a G80 for a perfect flight followed by Richard Shepherd's custom black rocket. This black rocket had really cool looking fins. Unfortunately its flight was not so good; powered by an H180, the rocket suffered a separation and an unplanned tumble recovery. Mike Alber put



up his well known Rainbow Warrior on an I-154 for a nice flight. I love those trails of black smoke from that Black Jack motor. The first K motor flight was claimed by Steve Cello with his Sentinel. Steve loaded this streamlined rocket with a K1000 motor commenting on his flight card, "heads up, [I'm] trying to bend this rocket in half." The rocket was really fast. It literally leapt from the pad and met it's death at 1414 feet when the rocket shredded into tiny pieces. Seems that it was just too much power—the the rocket did as Steve had predicted and bent in half.

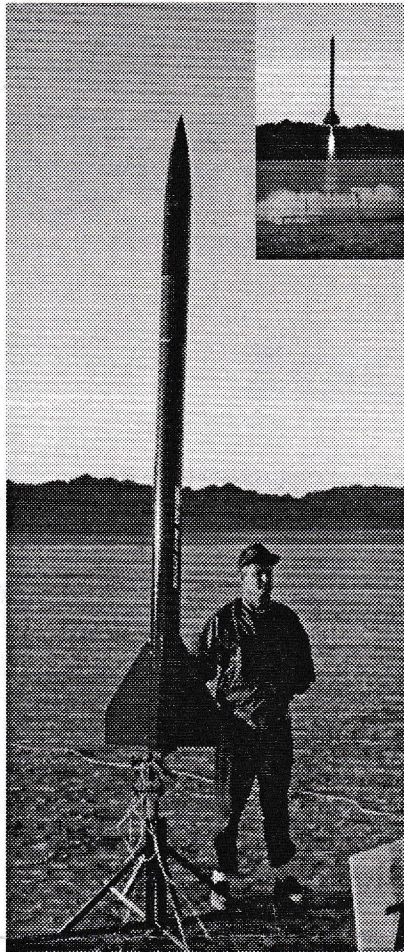
Rick O'Neil launched his Amraam 4 on an I211 for a straight arrow flight. Ron Nobly brought his totally awesome 'Ram Jet Rocket' to the pad. This orange rocket had what looked like air intake fans where the nose should be along with large fins somewhat like an Estes Alpha III. This rocket really moved off the pad on an I211. Unfortunately, on landing one of the large fins broke off. Ron claims he need just a bit more epoxy for the next flight.

Steve Ainsworth could not be kept away with his camera rockets. Although he lost his first camera rocket earlier in the day to sudden ground impact, Steve brought out his second camera rocket for another drag race. This time he raced his son's Arcas rocket: Steve's on a J145 hybrid and Dale's on an H97. Again Steve's rocket was beat off the pad by the other rockets. I wonder if it was the cold that caused the hybrid to ignite slower than usual. Anyway, Steve's rocket camera clicked away the photos for a perfect flight up. The chute deployed at apogee, but the entire payload section tumbled to the ground, crashing into a tent at the far end of the flight line. One of the camera mirrors broke off, but the rest of the rocket appeared OK. After looking at the booster section, Steve determined he need to add one more item to his flight check list: to check and make sure the parachute quick link is attached to the payload section before flight.

I wandered down the flight line and snapped a few photos here and there. Rikki Rockett showed up in his new Hummer and brought out his red V2 for show and tell. I found Mike Gillette from Rocket Dyne and admired his rocket. He offered to let me stand by his huge red rocket for a few photos which he took. Mike then prepped the rocket for the last flight on Saturday. Just before the sun set, Mike loaded his rocket on the far pad for a truly beautiful flight on a J800. The sun set just as the rocket lifted off the pad in a nice blast of fire. Mike had a perfect flight and a perfect recovery to mark the end of a great day of rocket flying.

I headed home and turned on the TV to check out the weather channel. Sunday promised to be sunny and warmer with almost no wind until the evening when strong gusts were expected. The question was how much warmer would it be and more importantly, how much wind would be get when. I went to sleep wondering about Sunday's weather. Sunday came and the day was better than anyone could have asked for. There was almost no wind and it warmed up to shirt sleeve weather by noon.

To be continued next month



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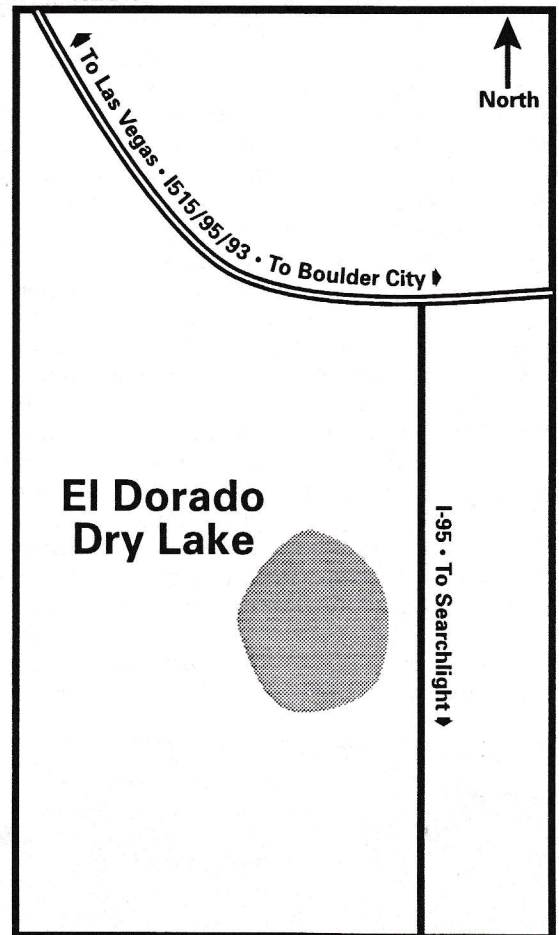
Launch Dates

December 21..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 January 18..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 February 22..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 March 22..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 April 19..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 May 17..... Delamar Dry Lake Bed
 June 21..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 July 19..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed
 August 23..... El Dorado Dry Lake Bed

Meeting Dates

Every Thursday prior to a launch date

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