



*Will it be the same old Moon after we mortals stake out our claims on it?*

# It must be moonglow

By MATTHEW J. BRUCCOLI

I, FOR ONE, AM AN AIRMAN who still feels that human flight in a fabric-covered, propeller-driven contraption is the *ne plus ultra* of scientific achievement, and I find myself these days wearing a hunted look.

The number of hangar flyers in the airport lean-to shrinks space and the narratives of great accomplishments on this or that cross-country seem no longer to ring with Homeric peal.

What, after all, is a pilot to boast about when the eyes of the world are on the Moon? The conversations have taken a lunar, I almost said lunatic, turn at the airports as well as at the bars—than which there can be no stronger proof of a problem's urgency—and the ramifications of lunar flight are getting expert treatment, you can be sure.

As a breed, flyers may be depended upon, when the chaff has been blown out of the arguments, to give fairly sober and constructive opinions upon such a subject as space flight. After all, one may be reasonably sure that the first man to reach the Moon will have at least a Private Pilot's ticket, and will therefore be one of us.

Certain facts begin to emerge from our hangar ruminations, and lesser ones than these have worn the mask of wisdom, such as to render us more than a little sensitive toward facets of the future which might escape the layman. These facts might not even occur to erudite scholars. It comes as a bit of shock, for example, that, from the viewpoint of accessibility, the Moon is closer to us today than America was to Christopher Columbus, and only details are delaying our first visit to it.

We know precisely where the Moon is, which is more than Columbus knew about America when he stumbled toward it. We have an almost exact knowledge of its geography (moonography will be the purist's term), its climate, its topography. Precise charts are available, at least of the visible face, giving terrain features, elevation of

peaks and valleys and distances between craters. The mean distance of 238,000 miles from the Earth to the Moon—only 226,000 miles at the perigee, its closest distance on an elliptical orbit—is not an astronomical figure to us who think nothing of flying 1,000 miles just to go fishing for a day. Traveling at the speed of a pokey train, you could reach the moon in four and a half months. At present airline speeds, it is scarcely more than three weeks away. And at speeds already experienced by mortal men, the Moon could be reached in less than a week.

It is not this side of the matter, however, to which I owe my haggard look, for we airport loungers are already accustomed to take in stride the annihilation of distance.

The technological details are being worked out. Propellants are being tested. Metals and ceramics for the required sustained velocities are under the electronic microscopes. Man-made satellites are no longer new news, and it is almost axiomatic (at any rate I propose it as an axiom) that where man's machine goes, man himself is bound to follow.

The problems of cabin pressures are not insurmountable. Animals already have pioneered the hop and skip that precedes the jump, just as assorted live-stock made the initial awesome sortie into space for the Montgolfiers.

What, then, the reason for our depression as we sit and spit against the stove? Is it that we have just barely finished learning how to plot a cross-country course and must now face the problems involved in calculating the gravitational influence of the Earth, the Moon and the Sun upon a space vehicle?

It is, indeed, not easy to be casual when an error in velocity that subtracts only 36 feet a second from an intended velocity of 36,000 fps would throw the vehicle off course and toward Venus. Those who have waited to meet friends at LaGuardia Airport, only to be told that the flight has landed at Newark, will (Continued on page 64)





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## It Must Be Moonglow

(Continued from page 29)

not need to be told of the consternation such a miscalculation could provoke. Yet the very existence of such brains, and electronic computers, as are capable of measuring the results of this hypothetical miscalculation, will tend to ensure against such errors occurring in fact.

No, it is not the problem of reaching the Moon that haunts us as we swap our hangar tales. That project is in the hands of objective and single-minded scientists and may very nearly be considered a *fait accompli*. The specter which causes the sensitive among us to bog down in moody anticipation is that of the legal disputation which will engulf the human mind to the exclusion of all else—love, football, flying, fishing—when the High Priests of the law begin to set forth their humorless, pontifical disquisitions upon the relation of Possession to Ownership of the Moon!

Nights on the Moon are 14 Earth-days long and the temperature sinks to 250 degrees below zero. Depend upon it, this will not deter litigation between men and governments as to who has the more valid title. However, such litigation will have to take place here on Earth because here only are we set up for fancy quarrelling. Additionally, in the absence of atmosphere around the Moon, there can be no sound, nothing on which the soundwaves can ride, and voiceless baristers are unthinkable.

One cannot help but be depressed by the prospects of legal machinations over the Moon, once a foothold is established there. Assuming a continuation of the current international climate, the probable contestants in the race for possession of the Moon will be the U. S. and Russia. There will be no "native" problem and no necessity for gerrymandering or the rigging of plebiscites because best authority has it that, without any appreciable atmosphere, no aboriginal claim to the premises is likely. Temperature during the day goes up to 212 degrees, the boiling point of water, and the day, like the night, is 14 Earth-days long. A new legal code must certainly evolve, tailored to the regulation of this unusual extra-terrestrial real estate. But make no mistake—the Moon is real estate. Men will stand on the Moon and, if they can do this, it is Real Property (loaded with rare minerals at that). If it is Real Property it has got to be owned because—well, because you just can't have something that you can stand on and not have it owned by somebody and over this ownership we shall probably see such quarrels as even Genghis Khan never dreamed of. The cosmic scene in legal travail in terms of Earth law, must give us pause.

The Common Law, as you know, gives ownership when a *possessio pedis*, an actual occupancy, is effected, whereby the occupier gives notice to the community that he claims and uses a certain property, not previously claimed or occupied, for himself exclusively. This may be an individual or a nation in whose

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name an individual plants a flag.

In any case, our enjoyment of the Moon thereafter would be by Easement. That is to say, since until now there has been an open and notorious, continuous, uninterrupted, undisputed and profitable use of the Moon and its effects since time immemorial by all people, a continued enjoyment of such profits for their personal use and advantage may not be suddenly halted by injunction or writ of trespass on the part of the new owner.

But will it be the same old Moon? Will its pleasures be as sweet if a man may thereafter enjoy them only by sufferance? Is the prospect of an American lover crooning by the light of a Communist Moon or of Ivan courting his Marouska under the spell of an iridescent U. S. 49th state, conducive to a salubrious state of affairs? Will not the ageless words, "I love you" stick in one's throat? It may be argued that various activities of a tender nature have long been pursued no less pleasantly for attributing the Moon specifically to Carolina, or Texas or Indiana—even Miami. By some, the far-flung isle of Manakua is designated its exclusive custodian.

But, I say, make-believe is one thing. These places have no deeds to the Moon filed at the County Clerk's. No boot of theirs has ever actually scuffed the Moon's silver. I don't worry about them. It's this real estate angle that has me down.

We must try to make the best of it, of course. The fair and logical thing will be to keep the Moon open to all comers and try to preserve what we can of the old traditions. Maybe we ought to form an association of lovers to mold world opinion. But so many of them get married and forget the Moon!

I tell you we have a real problem on our hands. The Moon is in court. END

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