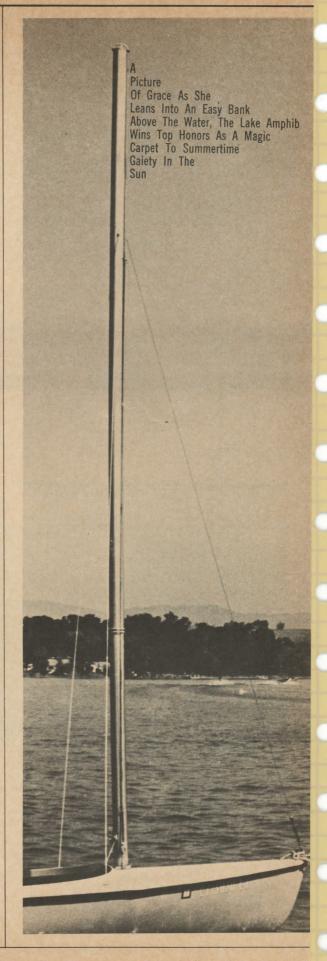
## Fun flight...

By Barry J. Schiff

Photos by Arnold Moss

THE sight of a boat with wings must have seemed a little strange to the motor-boat crowd at Lake Berryessa. As we maneuvered the Lake Amphibian around the various coves of the lake, power boats of all descriptions made cautious high-speed passes at us to determine what manner of beast could cruise the lake so comfortably at 50 mph.

The Lake Amphibian was designed to operate at high water speed and we had little difficulty outperforming even the ablest of the surface craft — except for one. During one particular "on the step" maneuver, we were indicating about 50 mph with the windows open. Sandy, my wife, was the first to notice the twin inboard racer rapidly overtaking us from the port side. The driver obviously meant to show us precisely who was master of that inland waterway.



# with the Wet Set!





Author Barry Schiff, left, had hard time getting used to position of throttle on windshield centerpost just above compass. Checkride was given by Lake Amphibian's Oakland distributor, Ron Timm, below.



The speedboat's occupants grinned with delight as they passed the amphibian, and with about five miles of open water ahead, the race was on; we were not about to be outdone.

Inching the throttle forward, I noticed about 22 inches of manifold pressure. Doing about 60 mph, we were barely catching the mahogany racer. Our worthy opponent gave it all he had and the twin screws churned the water mightily, but we had an ace up our sleeve. Arnie, in the right seat, closed the windows, lowered the flaps and set the prop to high rpm. The sight of that amphibian lifting a few inches out of the water and accelerating to 100-plus must have been a bit more than our adversaries could take.

Our unforgettable weekend with the Lake Amphibian began when Ray Rich, publisher of PRIVATE PILOT, called to ask if I'd be willing to have a weekend of fun with a new Lake Amphibian. The assignment especially appealed to me since my wife, Sandy, could go

along.

Ray had arranged, through the Lake factory, to obtain a model LA-4 from their Oakland-based distributor, Lake of California, Inc. The assignment also called for a shutterbug, so I phoned Arnold Moss at his home in Oakland. Arnie is an ex-Marine whirlybird pilot who also has his fixed-wing ratings, and his experience as an aerial photographer would be useful. Since the Lake is a four-place job, Arnie's wife, Jan, was invited along.

Pulling out the San Francisco and Sacramento sectionals, we selected Clear Lake, the largest fresh-water lake in California, as our overnight stop, and arrangements were made with Walt Weimer (an ex-Navy pilot), owner and operator of the Skylark Motel and Seaplane Base on the edge of Clear Lake in Lakeport, California. Ron Timm, the enthusiastic Lake distributor, also was contacted and we arranged for a formal aircraft checkout.

Early Saturday morning Sandy, Jan, Arnie and I drove to the Holiday Inn across from the Oakland Airport where Ron Timm joined us for breakfast. An aura of adventure and excitement was building as Ron spoke of sparkling waters, inland coves, and the serenity of mountain sunshine.

After breakfast Ron, Arnie and

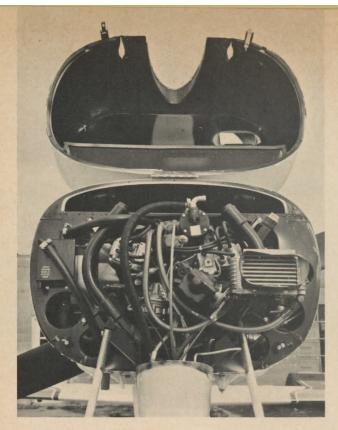
I left the girls to chat while we got on with the task of learning how to fly a new airplane. Although a seaplane was not new to me, the Lake Amphibian was.

As we proceeded with the preflight, Ron began slinging around various nautical terms such as starboard (right), port (left), bow (nose), etc. His barnacles really began to show when I made a comment about tie-down ropes.

"Seaplane pilots use lines, not ropes," he said.

Ron demonstrated how to remove the plugs from six water-tight compartments to check for water leakage into the hull or wing floats. These are checked daily and after heavy water work, and it is not unusual to find at least a cupful of water in the hull. He stressed an important point: "Don't forget to replace the plugs before operating into the water."

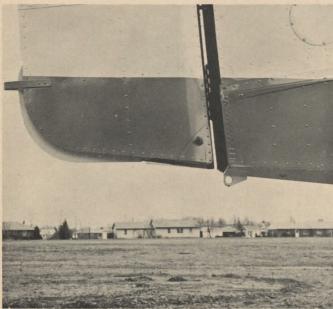
Along the top of the bow and above the fuselage, there are wide walkways stressed to support as many people as will fit. These areas later proved to be excellent platforms for fishing, diving and sunbathing. A small dzeus-fastened door on the top of the bow opens to reveal a  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -pound anchor and

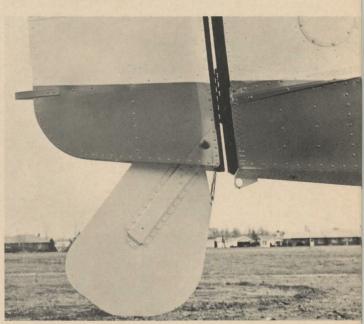


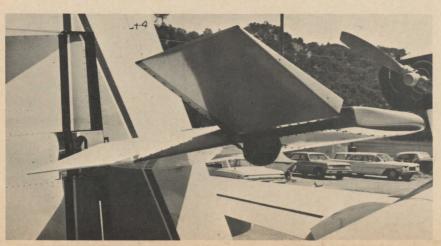
Front of engine pod hinges up, aft to expose plumbing on the Lycoming 180-hp engine mounted on pylon.

Pliant nose bumper cushions shock of mooring. Others are on floats.



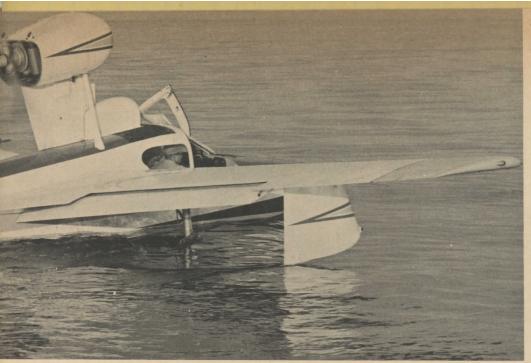






Base of rudder, above left, houses retracted water rudder. In lowered position, above, the latter gives Lake good maneuverability on water.

Starboard tailfeathers show split surfaces, with inboard elevator in neutral position and trim tab set to produce maximum nose-up trim.





Taxiing on the water, the lowered landing gear makes excellent speed brake (left). Main gear, above, is of stainless steel, retracts inward.

about 20 feet of line for mooring in waters without dock or ramp facilities.

The 40 gallons of fuel are stored in the fuselage, and the aircraft is refueled through a single filler neck. The on-off fuel valve is located above and behind the rear seat. Two fuel drain valves are located under the wing root on the port side of the fuselage. To check the oil, it is necessary to stand on the walkway above the cockpit.

The divided tail feathers of the LA-4 appear rather strange at first glance. The inboard horizontal control surfaces are the elevators, and are conventional in operation. The outboard surfaces, which look like elevators, are actually trim tabs and operate independently of the elevators.

Tucked neatly into the bottom of the rudder is another smaller rudder which can be lowered during slow-speed water taxiing. During all other operations, the water rudder must remain up and locked.

When the tie-down lines were removed, we climbed into 60L through the two hatches (never say doors) which, when closed, are actually the front windshields.

With the exception of the location of the four main engine controls, the cockpit appeared normal in all respects. The throttle, prop control, carburetor heat control and mixture control are mounted on the

ceiling between the two pilots' seats. Most amphibians have a similar arrangement because it simplifies connecting control cables and rods to the engine. This is perhaps the most perplexing problem facing the transitioning pilot. I was forever reaching forward in an attempt to find the throttle.

At first, Arnie and I were a bit confused by the canoe-type paddle located on the floor adjacent to the pilot's seat. However, I was soon to appreciate the wisdom of carrying this piece of equipment.

Landing gear, flaps and trim tabs are hydraulically activated, with the single electric hydraulic pump handling the load easily. The small handle protruding from the center of the instrument panel is a hand pump to be used in the event the electric pump fails. The handle is located where the throttle would be found on most single-engine landplanes, and every once in a while I'd reach for it out of sheer habit.

After cockpit familiarization, Ron had me turn on the master switch, hydraulic pump and electric fuel pump. Left hand on the starter button, right hand on the throttle (not the hydraulic pump handle!) and the 180-horsepower Lycoming 0-360A1A engine jumps to life.

Taxiing the nifty flying boat on land takes a bit of practice. Although the ship has tricycle landing gear, the nosewheel is not directly steerable. It is free to swivel, and directional control is maintained by using right or left brake, a system reminiscent of the early Beechcraft Bonancas.

The runup is similar to that of a typical single-engine land plane with one exception: the water rudder must be up! If extended, it will scrape the runway as the nose is rotated during liftoff. The flaps are strictly two position: full up or full down, with no in-between. Lake recommends full flaps for all take-offs and landings, land or water.

After a normal but slightly noisy takeoff, the landing gear was raised. Ron advised me that the flaps should be raised at about 75 mph and that the Lake has a best rate-of-climb speed of 85 mph.

Enroute to Lake Berryessa, Ron told us an interesting story about the structural integrity of the airplane which deserves repeating. A novice pilot was flying the amphibian over a small body of water and somehow managed to stall out at 75 feet. This is no easy chore in the Lake. The aircraft nosed down into 40 feet of water and hit the bottom nose first, then floated to the surface. The pilot suffered minor cuts and bruises and there







Six plugs are provided to drain the watertight hull compartments. Total daily accumulation: about two cups.

Former Navy pilot Walt Weimer, wife Audre and kids Jeff and Wendy own Skylark Motel and Seaport at Lakeport on shore of Clear Lake.





Flat-bottomed floats act as skis, so wing won't dig in on turns. The round stainless mirror allows the pilot to check nose gear position.

was only light damage to the bow of the aircraft and the wing floats. The Lake was flown back to the factory where it was determined that the aircraft structure suffered no damage. The ship was repaired to new condition for less than \$2,500, much of which was to replace the broken windows.

We flew toward Lake Berryessa at 3,500 feet, immediately impressed with the flight visibility of this airplane. With the wing located aft of the cabin and the engine mounted above the hull, we enjoyed "jet visibility."

Shortly, Lake Berryessa appeared between two of its surrounding peaks. Ron indicated that I should hold altitude. A unique demonstration was in order. The power was reduced to idle and the flaps and gear were lowered. Ron nudged forward on the yoke until the responsive amphibian was descending at a 30°-40° nose-down attitude. The airspeed indicator was steady at 125 and the rate-of-descent indicator was completely wound around.

This airplane has the ability to descend like a rock without an excessive buildup of airspeed. The rapid descent was especially impressive in light of the fact that with gear and flaps up, the Lake glides like a feather. At 80 mph, it has a glide ratio comparable to a Cessna 172.

In preparation for the water landing, I turned on the electric fuel pump, lowered the flaps and began a normal descent, holding a steady 70 mph and 15 inches of manifold pressure. After trimming out the back pressure, the flying boat settled at a meek 200 feet per minute. Ron told me to let the aircraft touch down in this attitude. "Don't touch a thing," he said. This caused me a little discomfort, since my experience in float planes resisted this type of casualness. But Ron knew this flying boat intimately.

About 400 feet above the water, Arnie startled me: "Hey, the gear is still up!" Some joke! But flying an amphibian requires definite thinking with regard to the landing gear: up for water, down for land.

As the Lake approached the water, I did what I could to resist flaring out. But before I could interfere, the flying boat began to skim the water. I reached up, retarded the power, and the ship nestled beautifully into the regime for which she was built. Ron shoved the control wheel full forward and we came to a quick halt.

"That's a trick you can't do in float planes," Ron commented. "You'd probably bury a float and flip over."

Taxiing the Lake in the water is a snap. Lower the water rudder and steer with the pedals. It handles just like a boat. This should be no surprise. After all, the Lake is a boat . . . with wings. The water rudder should be used only at slow speeds because it is not designed to take the hydrodynamic battering presented by the water when taxiing at high speed. Also the combination of aerodynamic and water rudders would cause over-control at high speeds.

Next Ron invited me to try some high-speed step turns. The flaps stay down and the water rudder comes up. Full power is applied and the Lake begins to plow through the water, creating quite a spray pattern. At about 30 miles per hour, back pressure is released and the "boat" rises over the hump and onto the step. Power is reduced to about 20 inches mp to

avoid becoming airborne. While zooming around the lake at 40 to 50 mph, you soon forget you're in an airplane. The Lake handles every bit as well as a conventional boat. We headed across the wake of another boat without so much as a nod from the amphib.

We tried a few stalls in various configurations. The large wing resisted the stall well. It wasn't easy to exceed the critical angle of attack on this bird; she could hold her own in the air or on the water.

We were soon over San Francisco Bay again and it dawned on me: this airplane did not have the built-in "automatic rough" commonly associated with landplanes. What a pleasure to fly over land or water without worrying about engine failure!

After a normal entry into the Oakland 27R traffic pattern, we turned on to a short final and I reduced the airspeed to about 70 mph. A few feet above the runway I began a normal flare, but to no avail. The Lake, still with a mind of her own, settled comfortably onto the runway. Full stall landings were almost impossible. Ron suggested that land landings be made similarly to water landings. On land, as well as water, the Lake does a better job on her own.

We loaded approximately 40 pounds of gear in the baggage compartment behind the rear seats for our water weekend; 240 pounds of female sandbags occupied the rear seats. A few minutes later, Alcatraz Island slipped past our port wing.

Enroute to Lake Berryessa, both Arnie and I were amazed at the hands-off stability of the aircraft. The Lake held 3,000 feet msl in smooth air without any attention whatever from either of us. The altimeter needles might have been glued into position.

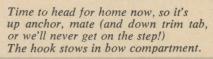
One flight characteristic of the LA-4 which surprised us was the lack of pitch-up or pitch-down which might be expected with the thrust line so high above the aircraft centerline. At various attitudes and airspeeds, we attempted to create a pitching moment by radically changing the power from idle to wide open and back again. Only slight pitch changes were noticed.

It was Jan who first noticed the Continued on page 59



This secluded island made an ideal spot for an afternoon stopover for a picnic on scenic Lake Berryessa.

Sandy Schiff hooked an honest-togoodness fish angling from the bow of the Lake, which converts to a sleeper for two by removing seats.







#### FLY-IN FOR WET SET

Continued from page 23

reflection of sunlight from the waters of Lake Berryessa. At 1,000 feet above the water I completed the checklist and reassured myself that the landing gear was up.

I selected a point about 1,000 yards ahead and established a landing speed and attitude for the Lake. With a bit more confidence than I'd had earlier in the day, I trimmed the aircraft for a handsoff landing. The chatter from the peanut gallery ceased as the girls looked at each other with semistartled expressions. But before either Sandy or Jan could express their doubts with regard to my foolhardiness, the Lake began to skim the still, sparkling waters. The landing was so smooth that the exact moment of touchdown was not discernible, and confidence and excitement returned to the backseat drivers.

By only partially reducing power, we kept 60L on the step and began playing motor boat. We sashayed right and left, doing about 45 per, and again attracted the attention of nearly every boatman in sight. Our apology goes to the water skier (name unknown) who lost his balance and literally flipped at the sight of the Lake performing tight, high-speed 360s in the water.

We became a little more serious as the boat-launching area and restaurant came into view. By retarding the throttle to idle, the Lake grudgingly gave up speed and settled 18 inches into the water.

One must be extremely careful when maneuvering a seaplane near docks and obstacles. There are no brakes, and this particular aircraft does not have a reversible pitch propeller. At idle power, 60L was chugging along at about 5-7 mph. This was a bit too fast, so I dropped the landing gear. The three landing gear struts and wheels and the open nose wheel doors make excellent water brakes. The Lake slowed to a crawl as we approached the ramp and slowly we made a couple of circles with the water rudder down. It became obvious that we had made our intentions known when a kindly gentleman helped clear the ramp of boat traf-

En route to Berryessa, the Lake was an airplane. While maneuvering on the water, it was a boat. Now we were about to play automobile as we started a slow taxi toward the ramp.

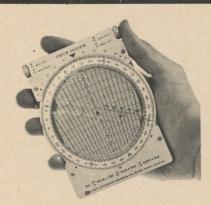
You mean you're going up that thing?" shrieked Jan.

"Why not?" Arnie replied. "This is an amphibian."

I made my final cockpit check, as the ramp was now a meager 50 feet ahead. A bright green light indicated the landing gear down and locked. Failing to double check could prove embarrassing should the Lake sound its resentment by the scraping of its hull against the sloping ramp.

About 20 feet out we were committed to the ramp. There was no room to return to open water because of the docks bracketing the entrance to the area. Everybody in the restaurant had come outside to view the winged newcomer.

We taxied slowly up to the ramp. As I applied almost full power, Arnie lifted the water rudder to prevent any damage to it. The Lake leaped out of the water and up the



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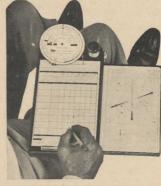


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After lunch, Arnie and I gave 60L a quick preflight and drained her hull of only a few drops of water, while the girls ran off for a change of wardrobe. Moments later, they appeared in their swimsuits. Before you could sing the first verse of Anchors Aweigh, we had taxied down the ramp and were drifting (with water rudder down) toward open waters.

The preflight runup is as simple on water as on land, with two exceptions. Consideration again must be given to the landing gear. At this point, it must come up. Second, a check of the magnetos requires some taxiing room. The Lake simply won't stand still during the application of the slightest amount of power.

Full power urges 60L to accelerate slowly in the plowing phase of the takeoff. This simply means the hull is still fully in the water and the aircraft has not yet nosed over onto the "step." At about the right moment, back pressure is released, but the Lake continues to plow; she doesn't rise onto the step. With great frustration, I attempt to push the nose down and lift the hull from the water, but no luck. Something is definitely wrong — but what?

Since I didn't wish to overheat the Lycoming, I retarded the throttle and let the Lake decelerate. Arnie and I exchanged confused glances and began to debate this predicament. The girls listened bravely and attentively.

The aircraft was at the full gross weight of 2400 pounds. (Would you believe a little over gross?) This, by itself, should not prohibit a takeoff. Lake Berryessa is only 440 feet above sea level and the outside air temperature wasn't that high, only about 75°F.

I confirmed my suspicions by opening the port hatch and viewing the tail surfaces. The trim tabs, about the same size as the elevators, were in the full nose-up position.. When the elevators were pushed down in an attempt to nose the aircraft over the "hump" and onto the step, their effect was almost totally negated by the trim tabs. With the tabs set in this fashion, full nose-down elevator has little effect. This problem appears more pronounced at high gross loads and had not been encountered during the checkout earlier in the day. It was here, too, that we

decided the LA-4 could stand a bit more horsepower.

The trim tabs were repositioned to neutral and a new takeoff run was begun. At about 35 mph I pushed forward on the yoke and the Lake responded more willingly. Soon we were on the step and accelerating. As the Lake lifted from the water, the girls began to relax once more.

Under these conditions, the Lake isn't the world's greatest climber. At the best rate-of-climb speed of 85 mph, the rate-of-climb never exceeded 400 feet per minute.

About five miles up Lake Berryessa, Arnie spotted a small island. It appeared deserted, an ideal place to break out the thermos bottles for some cool, liquid refreshment. A gentle bank, smooth power reduction and 70 mph descent speed soon found us churning up more water.

After a complete circumnavigation of "our" island, we decided to anchor on the shady side. As we gingerly approached the beach, I threw open the port hatch and stuck the paddle down into about two feet of water. As the oar began to scrape bottom, I quickly cut the engine with the mixture control and almost simultaneously began paddling backwards to bring the ship to a halt and not allow the hull to hit bottom. Although the aluminum is considered pebble-proof, I didn't know how large the pebbles grew in this area.

Arnie jumped out and, in the style of Sir Walter Raleigh, carried the girls ashore — one at a time. The anchor then was removed from its cubbyhole in the bow and the

ship was anchored for the duration.

What an ideal spot to get "weathered in!" Shelter wouldn't be a problem, since the Lake converts to a sleeper for two by quick removal of the two rear seats. There is ample room to stretch your legs into the lengthy fuselage. But the idea of comfortable rooms at the Skylark Motel and Seaport was more appealing to the girls, so we hoisted anchor and "set sail" for Clear Lake, about 40 miles to the northwest.

En route to that 20-mile-long body of water, we decided it was time to see just how fast this airplane would fly at 4,500 feet. The outside air temperature was 60° and the indicated airspeed held steady at 115: true air speed was computed to be 124 mph. The power was set to 2400 rpm and 23 inches of manifold pressure, equal to 75 percent power or 135 hp. The Lake will true out at 131 mph at its optimum altitude of 6,000 feet, according to the factory specifications.

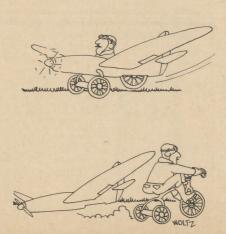
I barely had time to tuck away my computer before we found ourselves within gliding range of Clear Lake. After a shallow power descent, we soon found the city of Lakeport. The Skylark Motel and Seaport was easy to spot.

The ramp was barely wide enough to accommodate 60L, and the figure of Walt Weimer standing ready at the top of the ramp, complete with hand signals, was a welcome sight. The wheels touched bottom, and with a short blast of power, 60L headed for the lawn of the Skylark Motel. The day had been exciting, but a bit tiring. We were all ready for Walt's warm hospitality and some relaxation in the country club atmosphere of his beautiful, rustic motel.

As we deplaned, Walt introduced us to his wife Audre, and his children Jeff and Wendy.

Early next morning, as we stepped out onto the patio of our rooms, we could see 60L already surrounded by curiosity seekers. I don't imagine many of the Skylark's visitors who had checked in on the street side of the motel ever expected to see a boat with wings resting on the lakeside lawn.

While the girls dressed, Arnie and I hopped aboard, fired her up, and began playing motor boat once more. This was to be Arnie's first attempt at seaplane flying. He was also to be my first seaplane student. Neither one of us knew what



to expect. To our astonishment, Arnie was fully qualified to take his check ride at the completion of only two hours of dual instruction. This I attribute to the excellent water and flight handling characteristics of the Lake amphibian.

Returning to the Skylark, we found Sandy and Jan waiting for us on the dock near the ramp. We parked 60L next to the putting green and strolled over to the snack shop for some mid-morning nutrition.

The balance of the morning and mid-afternoon was spent putting on the green or fishing, diving, and sunbathing from the hull of 60L. We even found out later that we could have water skied behind 60L if we'd had a suitable quick release mechanism for the ski rope. It's been done numerous times before. What a ball that would have been!

As we taxied into the water and raised the landing gear, we could see the Weimers waving goodbye. After our last water takeoff we headed for the Nut Tree Ranch, about 23 miles west-southwest of the Sacramento VOR. The Nut Tree Ranch is a great place to stop for lunch or to do some rather unusual shopping.

Although the 1900-foot sea-level runway is not water, the Lake felt at home here too. As we taxied into the transient parking area, we felt again the eyes of those about us drawn like a magnet.

A small train carries one from the airport proper through the Nut Tree Ranch to the restaurant and shopping center; it's a charming ride of less than a mile. At the end of the line is a large toy store and a still larger shopping area with products from all over the world. The restaurant is complete with an enormous aviary to remind the intrepid aviator of his airborne heritage. The prices are a bit high but the quality is equally high. The entire setup seems to have been planned with children in mind. There's plenty to keep them amused and entertained.

The time had come to begin the last and most regretted leg of our trip, the return to reality.

Arnie tapped my shoulder and pointed to the sleeping beauties in the rear seat, then to the Golden Gate Bridge ahead. It was too beautiful in the setting sun to let them sleep through it. I touched Sandy on the arm. She raised her head briefly, eyes closed, only to let it fall again. The trip was over.



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