

## Escape Routes at 30,000 Feet

*By Hap Hansen*

Do you like to fly? I don't. I hate to admit it, but I'm scared to fly. It's not that I don't enjoy getting from one place to another faster than if I were driving, sailing or hitchhiking. It's just that I am sure I have lost most of the control of my life once I've checked my luggage. And sometimes, with the time lost in driving to the airport, the time lost waiting in lines and in the lounge, and the time lost waiting in the plane for the flight to be called to take off, I think I could have driven to my destination and arrived before the airplane did.

The worst part of the whole experience of flying though, is the way passengers are treated by the airline's employees. It's like watching a shepherd and his dog working a flock of sheep! Get in line here! Don't go there! Have boarding passes ready! Remove your shoes! No smoking here! No smoking on this flight!

Most passengers arrived at the airport a few hours before flight time. Many of them, including me, spent those hours at the bar, downing cheap Gin Martini's at seven bucks a pop. After what seemed an interminable amount of time, we board the plane. There's been a delay, of course, probably because of the weather in Pittsburgh. And now I have no chance to catch my connecting flight. And I'm trapped in my seat after listening to scary instructions about fastening my seat belt and the fact that escape routes are shown in red! Escape routes! At 30,000 feet! So now I'm strapped in with no control over my destiny.

Finally the plane gets airborne. Now the Captain gets on the speaker-phone and in unintelligible sounds, tries to explain the delay. Of course, no one understood what the Captain mumbled. And of course, no one understands why a 100 million dollar airplane contains a sound system that's only worth about ten bucks!

Approaching an altitude of 30,000 feet, the plane quits moaning, groaning and clunking and begins the smoothest part of the ride. Now for the first time since beginning our take-off roll, I open my eyes and release the white-knuckled grip on the arm rests and I am no longer scared. After serving free drinks to the first-class passengers, who have paid twice as much for their tickets as I have, but aren't going to arrive any sooner, the Stewards serve free soft drinks to the rest of us, accompanied by a foil package containing about four almonds!

Not counting the few severe downdrafts that scare me and move my stomach up to my throat, the rest of the flight is usually uneventful, except for the scary landing, which is really a controlled crash. Ah well. As someone once said, "Flying is nothing more than hours and hours of sheer boredom, interspersed with moments of sheer terror!"