

# Only 1 Racer Escapes State : Balloonists Go Up, Up and Not Too Far Away

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**PALM SPRINGS** — A day and a half after liftoff, the only entry in the 33rd Gordon Bennett helium balloon race to make it out of California was the white California Grape, which was floating over Las Vegas on Sunday.

The Grape, occupied by Jim Jones, a Phoenix chiropractor, and Josef Starkbaum, an Austrian airline pilot, had managed to travel about 160 miles in generally uncooperative winds. The winner is the balloon that travels the farthest measured in a straight line.

Of the nine original entries, the only other craft still aloft was the defending champion, Rosie O’Grady, which was over Baker, about 90 miles to the north of here, race spokesman Debbie Fawcett said. Last year the O’Grady wafted its way 1,004 miles to Hobart, Okla.

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But this year the yellow and red O’Grady, piloted by veteran balloonist Joe Kittinger and skywriter Bob Snow, both of Orlando, Fla., was averaging just 2 m.p.h., contrasted with the Grape’s 4 m.p.h.

“Both seem to be becalmed,” Fawcett said late Sunday.

## Struggling to Stay Up

Each was struggling to save its ballast (sandbags) in order to stay up as long as possible.

The unofficial rankings for the other entries were:

Switzerland’s Jura, which landed near the Old Woman Mountains, 77 miles northeast of here; the City of St. Louis, which came down near the Old Dad Mountains 68 miles away; Japan’s Benihana, which burst loose before its scheduled takeoff and flew 32 miles without a crew; the Blue Rose (30 miles); the Los Angeles Times (24 miles); Excelsior (9 miles), and Universal (8 miles).

Most of the landings were uneventful, although the Times balloon plopped down in Pioneertown, a one-time frontier movie set near Twentynine Palms that now has a small number of residents.

## ‘People Were Very Nice’

“It had a wide main street that was unpaved and a saloon that was open with two horses tied to a post,” Times crewman Fred Krieg, a Perris, Calif., airline pilot, said. “We didn’t know quite what to expect. But the people were very nice.”

The French, it turns out, had a double dose of bad luck, organizer Tom Heinsheimer revealed.

First, they couldn’t find a balloon to race in. But they showed up anyway with their mail, traditional cargo for the race. (Balloon mail was a one-time method of air delivery begun in France when Paris was under siege during the Franco-Prussian War.)

“So,” Heinsheimer said, “who did the French, a team without a balloon, give their mail to? The Benihana, which became the balloon without a team.”