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This YEAR'S CONTEST

When the rules and regulations for the Ninth Annual National Soaring Contest were first published in the February issue of this magazine, we immediately heard a hue and cry from certain members of the soaring fraternity. When they read that the requirements, to count, had been raised for distance from seven to thirty-five miles, for altitude from one thousand to thirty-five hundred feet, and for duration from one to five hours, they saw that there was little chance to meet all these requirements with their low performance craft. They did not realize that this was one of the very reasons why these rules were drawn up.

A number of our clubs and members have been content to fly, year after year, utility and secondary gliders, while a few of their friends borrowed, scraped and worked to provide themselves with high performance sailplanes capable of real soaring as we now know it. What was the result? Last year's contest, held under unusually adverse conditions, was largely a competition between ten pilots who were able, with their sailplanes, to put up real performances, despite these conditions, and, consequently, came in for the lion's share of the prize money and trophies. Apparently it needed even more than this to stir the utility converts and bring them to a realization that, if they individually, and the soaring movement in America as a whole, were to keep apace with world progress, they must equip themselves with sailplanes capable of real performances. So we have this year's national contest for the owners of sailplanes and the secondary contest in Michigan for those who, from lack of either experience or funds, are forced to continue with secondary gliders.

The Chairman of our Contest Committee said that, after he had published the rules for this year's contest, he was forcibly reminded of the early days in Germany, where, as a competitor in one of the first national contests, he and other pilots royally cursed the contest committee for putting as the requirement for the largest prize, a duration flight of forty minutes. Such duration had never been heard of, and was impossible, said they. However, they soon began to try to find ways and means of winning that prize and, at the end of the contest, one of them not only did so, but went well beyond to establish a world record of over one hour.

A similar thing has already happened this year in our country. Even before the complaints had begun to die down, serious designers, builders and pilots in various parts of the country had put on their thinking caps, to see what could be done. At this year's contest we will see some of the results. Well known faces will appear in very different cockpits of new designs they have built, or standard types they have bought. These are the fellows who will make the future of soaring in America; who will fight to see that we will cease to take a back seat in international motorless flying, and will eventually put the United States in the forefront of the great nations who recognize the value of flying without power.

There have been some who said that, as a result of the requirements being made so much higher, we may expect only a mere handful of ships at Elmira this year. Although we seriously doubt this, we would like to reply, "What of it?" If ten or fifteen sailplanes, flown by competent pilots, can go out and establish new records and put up a new high for totals of real distance and altitude flights, how much better for our national contest to have these few that count, than five times as many that could not really perform. Two weeks after this issue appears, we will know the answer.

While on the question of the Contest, we would like to call to the attention of the pilots, the SSA Contest Committee and the Elmira Area Soaring Corporation, the question of whether it may not be advisable to shorten future national contests to eight or, at the most, ten days, rather than two weeks. As has been discovered in several nations abroad who have done just this, there are really sound arguments in favor of such a decision.

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