

# SIMPLIFYING CONTEST RULES

By BEN SHUPACK

**F**RITZ COMPTON did yeoman service for soaring with his article, "Standardization of Contest Rules," which appeared in the November-December 1946 issue of *SOARING*. He set a pattern of thinking which produced a set of rules for the 14th Annual Contest which functioned with the fewest headaches to the contestants and management alike, of any national contest.

However, there were a few. Duration proved to be an annoyance to both the contestants and the barograph room. For example, Pilot A and Pilot B flew 100 miles in their high performance sailplanes. A arrived an hour earlier than B because of his superior skill and planning, yet lost in points to his inferior opponent, Pilot B, who gained points by fumbling a few thermals for an hour more. Pilot C stumbled in two hours later by the sheer grace of Texas thermals and the rabbit's foot he kept in the barograph compartment and became the winner. The 14th Annual Contest saw the queer anomaly of special prizes being won for the fastest time to Vernon and the loser forging ahead in contest points. True, everybody won something, the winner won a money prize and the loser won some extra points, but it is hardly the way to pick the champion. The barograph room found the going rough because the barograph clocks did not take kindly to the rapid changes in temperature from 120 degrees F in the sun to freezing at altitude. Perhaps that is why duration was omitted from consideration in the national contests before the war. Those pre-war lessons were forgotten and had to be learned over again. For the 1948 contest let us eliminate duration.

A study of the performance of the contestants shows a greater variation in distance than in altitude. Where

altitudes differed only in hundreds of feet, distances varied by many miles. Everybody seemed to be able to ride the upcurrents almost as high as his fellow pilot, but striking across country in search of another thermal was something else again. That ability was the earmark of the accomplished soaring pilot. The pilot able to go places was plagued with the mental picture of a fellow contestant piling up points over the field with duration and altitude, getting a sound night's sleep with not a single retrieving worry.

It is about time we admitted the fact that cloud flying, especially thunderstorms, is a form of aerobatics. We do not give contest points for slow rolls, inverted flying, etc. The fact that up until now we did give points for altitude does not justify it. When a pilot enters a cloud he is going to go up! He may do stalls, spins and inadvertent rolls in the cloud, but why give him credit for entering a condition which has carried up a B-17? After the pilot is tossed out on top he is in position to make good his gliding distance, but can this pilot stretch his glide by finding thermal after thermal? The fundamental difference between Pilots B and A is not the ability of B to follow A up in a thermal, but the distance each travels. Pilot B once he leaves the thermal does not have the background and experience to do more than make more or less a straight glide to a landing. Pilot A will report back from 200 miles away because of his real ability and skill in soaring and shows his superiority not in altitude gained but in distance covered. Therefore, let us eliminate all altitude points from future national contests.

With the elimination of points for duration and altitude a national contest would be decided by the only real test of soaring skill, distance!

## RULES OF THE 14th NATIONAL

Observations by R. Sirretta, Paris Correspondent

**4-0—Point award duration.** The points for duration given for distance flights are a premium to slowness.

If two contestants make the same flight, the winner will be the one making the lesser speed. . . .

This is against all sporting rules.

In France the points for duration are available only for flights above the field or for slope flights with return to the take-off point.

It will be more logical to award points for the best average speed.

**8-0—Change in Contest rules.** The rules are a contract between the spirit of the contest and the contestant.

All contestants are supposed to accept the rules published before the contest, or to request changes before the opening.

But the decision to change the articles 2-9 of the rules the last day of the contest is not very sporting,

the only one victim being the French pilot Valette.\*

A change in the rules during the contest must be discussed and accepted by *all* the pilots and not only by a majority, the majority being always losing and, accordingly, against the winners.

**2-8—It is in unfavorable weather that the pilots display their qualities.**

To stop the flights in this weather is to favor the ordinary pilot to the prejudice of the best.

The rules 2-8 and 8-0 are . . . levelling by the bottom and decidedly of poor sportsmanship.

Some pilots have been towed in the direction of their flight. This practice is not sporting. The tow must be made behind a starting line going through the center of the take-off field and perpendicular to the direction of the flight.

\* Ed. note: Didion and Comey were also affected adversely. We know in particular that Comey, having flown 236 miles, had to spend the entire night retrieving to be on hand to fly the last day. Valette, Didion, and Comey would have had the last day off if the rules had not been changed.