

By RENE COMTE

Swiss International



A. Valette goes aloft in a French AIR-100 as "Chief" A. Gehrig, Secretary of the Swiss Aero Club, flags him off.

TWENTY-EIGHT pilots met in the exciting International Soaring Competition held at Samedan, Switzerland, from July 19 to 31, 1948.

France, Great Britain, and Switzerland were represented by teams of six pilots. The others were not as numerous, but on each team were internationally famous pilots. Competition was expected to be really tough.

Samedan is a little village in the 25-mile-long, straight upper "Engadine," which is known as the most picturesque valley in the Swiss Alps. It is situated in the Southeastern corner of Switzerland near the Italian and Austrian border. The people in this valley speak their own language, the "Romanche," similar to French, Italian and Latin. The native people also speak a Swiss dialect and German. If you want a change, you have to make just a five-mile trip to St. Moritz where you can hear as much English as you want.

A long side valley joins the Engadine near Samedan. At the corner you will find the famous Muottas Muragl, a steep hill rising 2500 feet above the valley and with a cable car ascending on one side to the hotel. The big Samedan airport at 5700 feet altitude is at its foot.

A strong wind often blows down the valley. It is named "Maloya," after the first village at the upper end of the Engadine. The Maloya is a local air current and starts usually between 10 A.M. and noon. Most large valleys have their own local winds and one can sometimes find two opposite wind directions in two parallel valleys only a few miles apart.

During the war Swiss glider pilots found that the

Maloya gives you a good, fast lift along the ridges of the Muottas Muragl. A simple winch tow on the airport is sufficient to start you on a seven-hour ride in the wonderland of the mountains. In a very short time Samedan became the "El Dorado" of Swiss sail-plane pilots.

When the war was over members of the Academic Flying Club of Zurich organized a competition with circular flights, goal with return flights, and speed races. This was the way to have soaring competitions with little expense, no airplane tows, no retrieving by car. In 1947 the Swiss Aero Club invited pilots from all countries to compete in the first open International Engadine Soaring Week. Twenty-two contestants represented seven countries and everybody was enthusiastic. The FAI then decided to have its first international post-war soaring contest there in 1948.

Pilots from Egypt, Finland, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Sweden, as well as the teams from France, England, and Switzerland accepted.

Everybody was sorry when the news came in that the expected Polish and Czechoslovakian teams could not leave their countries because of "technical difficulties." It was also a disappointment to learn that no American pilot would compete in the meet. European soaring people hear much about growing interest in this sport in the United States, and hope that, in spite of the big ocean in between, European and American pilots will meet in the future for friendly competition and exchange of experience.

The contest committee had decided to organize the following events: 1. Altitude flights, 2. Goal flights (optional goals), with distance awards, 3. Goal flights with return, distance and altitude award, 4. 100 Km. speed race with distance award, 5. 100 Km. triangular speed race, and 6. Closed circular speed races with distance award.

For many American pilots it might seem rather complicated to divide up a contest so. "Altitude gives speed, speed gives distance," you may think, "why not measure only the distance and you will find out who is the champion." This is certainly a way to do it, and in a flat country it is undoubtedly a good way, too, especially if adequate money is available for retrieving.

However, a soaring competition in a mountainous region is something else again. Mountains make the difference in soaring contests that hurdles make between a horse race and a horse jumping competition. In the horse race, the best jockey and the best horse will win, all you have to measure is the time. In a horse jumping competition it is the skill that counts—the art of horseback riding. The same thing applies to the Alpine Soaring Contest. The pilot has to go through a difficult test. One or two good performances are not enough to make him win, it is much more important that he does not lose ground on a bad day.