



Sailplanes line up for opening day.

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THE Southwestern Soaring Contest, August 7-14, 1949, was held at Grand Prairie, Texas. Within a period of six days, ten competing pilots accumulated 2842 airline miles, effected the longest distance flight of 1949, and established a new national goal flight distance. Twelve flights exceeded 100 miles each, two being over 200 and one approaching the 300-mile mark.

These achievements were remarkable for the small number of contestants, most of them inexperienced in distance soaring. Only one held Golden "C"; six were holders of Silver "C"s; two had "C"s; and one had never made a soaring flight.

Newspaper coverage was excellent. The contest was closely followed by leading newspapers of the Southwest with daily accounts of the contestants' standings and details of their flights. Photographs on the contest several times made the front page. Television and radio newscasts also favored the event. The publicity greatly increased general interest in motorless flight, particularly in the Southwest area.

The arrival of the contestants and their ships had much in common with an Easter parade when the latest fashions are displayed. There was one truly new model, the Schweizer I-23, owned by E. J. Reeves, SSA President. A ship which attracted much attention as the "most revamped" glider was the LK-Flat Top, down from the Mississippi State College Sailplane Research Project. A third ship, brought from California by Herb and Betty Gibbons, a TG-3, was one of the cleanest in the country. Its owners attained high aerodynamic efficiency by concentrating 200 man hours on one of its most fundamental parts—the wing. Its finish was superb—no surface irregularities or roughness to excite turbulence in the skin boundary layer. Flight tests, made at the contest, revealed that perfecting the airfoil had produced superior performance.

The only home-designed and home-built gliders were the Ross Ranger and the Screamin' Wiener. The Ranger, a small ship combining short span and high

aspect ratio, is an all-metal creation by Vernie Ross of Wichita Falls. The Wiener is well known by its past performances.

The Minimoa, one of the most graceful sailplanes ever built, was brought from Florida by Walter ("Pop") Krohne, the soaring grandfather. "Pop" was easily persuaded to take the "Mini" to Fort Worth on Saturday for an all-day exhibit on the City Hall grounds. A similar exhibit was placed in Fair Park at Dallas. Both shows obtained good publicity for the contest.

Opening day, Sunday, August 7, was dedicated to the spectators. Morning saw the usual hustle and bustle of pilots and crews, busy with final preparations for the afternoon's special events. The first briefing was held at 10:00 A. M. Sequence and timing were stressed to make the show not only good entertainment but safe.

The "special events" began at 2:00 P. M. with an address by Mr. Sam McIlhenny, President of the Grand Prairie Chamber of Commerce. Immediately following, twelve U. S. Navy planes flew by in low, close formation and wound up with a demonstration of conservative aerobatics and a snake dance. Pop and his Mini started the glider acts with a single tow. Johnny Hall, the youngest chief tow pilot in the country, and Pop, the oldest contestant, were the team for a perfect start.

Next Reeves, flying his I-23, and B. B. Cooley, flying the Wiener, responded to a signal from Corky Fincher to start rolling on a double tow. Similar in lines and matched in color, the two sailplanes were a striking picture. They were followed by a triple tow, with Ray Parker flying Flat Top in center escorted by matched LK's. The triple was on the tail of a 450 Wasp Stearman donated by Jack Robinson, Fort Worth, and flown by Chet Carlson, aerial sign pilot.

Reeves and Cooley soon found themselves overtaken by the 450 Wasp, and all reached the specified release altitude of 3000 feet simultaneously. The gliders cut loose together and the tugs dived clear. The sailplanes