

# SNOW BIRD MEET

Proves That Soaring Is Good Sport the Year 'Round



CANADIAN CONTESTANTS: Guy Auger, left; Jacques Codere, right, are assisted by Reynolds Hartman in setting up. Note ice on trailer.

by ROBERT G. DISTIN

Elmira's annual winter soaring contest, the Snow Bird Meet, went off on schedule with a full field of contestants, including three Golden "C's", Larry Gehrlein, Sr., Paul A. Schweizer and Per Meulengracht.

The Thanksgiving week-end of November 27-30, 1952 featured two consecutive cold front passages. This paid off to the tune of over 70 hours of soaring on the winter air above Harris Hill Soaring site.

It was entirely a duration contest, thanks to strong ridge lift and generous convection areas among the snow squall cumulus clouds.

A strong entry contingent from neighbor Canada added much to the pleasure and character of the operations, days and evenings both.

Operations were planned and carried out to get two main results; top sport and good safety control. Both were achieved.

Thursday, Nov. 27 was entry and practice day. Winch towing off the Harris Hill flight strip was "on the house" as it was during the remainder of the week-end.

Friday, Nov. 28, first official contest day, was launched at the 0900 hour with pilots' meeting and weather briefing. The competition requirements, scoring methods, and safety controls were outlined. Scoring, similar to the International Spanish Meet system, gave each day's top performance 1,000 points, with the runners-up pro rata down the line. This system worked well here, especially because all performances were known by sundown each day and the scoring could be done without delay. All official flights were ruled on a return-to-starting point and before sundown basis.

Safety controls included screening for pilot and ship certifications, check rides with newcomers to the Hill and pre-planned traffic pattern during approaches.

The Friday morning weather map prepared for pilots briefing showed that it would be a soaring day. Under the stimulus of this information, ground crews snapped to on the frosty morning heights.

By 1040 hour the curtain, snow curtain, that is, was up and the stage set. The winch was in position, backed to

a WNW breeze on the brow of the hill, and warmed up to the work of the day.

Sunshine as well was commencing its thermal and spirit warming work.

Early-bird Larry Gehrlein, Sr., was first off and up the winch line at 1044 hour in this long-wing Schweizer 1-23C. He seems to be on his way to doing some impressive flying in this ship, (one of the two Schweizer "Madrid-specials"), on which he took delivery after the International last summer. He won the Snow Bird Meet, clinching it on the second day when he soared high over the hill on a midget wave (or something!) for over an hour of a late wintry overcast afternoon. No one else was hanging on at the time. Must know how to fly, along with his competitive spirit.

Jack Ames was off right after Larry, flying the Loudon UTG-1, a Canadian design built at the University of Toronto and appearing to be a well-behaved ship. It is a high wing single seater in the intermediate sailplane category. Jack is president of the Soaring Association of Canada and a fine sportsman.

Incidentally, these two pilots, in the order of their initial take-offs, were winner and third-placer when the official competition ended at sundown the following day. Aggressive behavior seems to help. While they were making feeler flights of ten minutes each, others were climbing into the air.

By 1200 hour, seven ships were well up, either on ridge currents, or comfortably established in the upper regions on cloud convection. Big Larry Gehrlein had settled down, along with Jack Ames, for flights of five hours, one minute and; five hours and four minutes respectively. Little Larry and his 1-19 was in and out of the bottom of the stack three times during the day, and was in there for the mass landings at sundown, after a 49 minute flight.

There were nineteen recognized contest flights during the day, averaging two hours each.

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