

THE 20th NATIONAL AS OBSERVED BY A SENIOR AIRLINES PILOT

CAPTAIN F. B. COMPTON

JULY 6th—the day before the Contest began, we drove up to Harris Hill, through that green wooded canyon, and passed the usual squirrels, chipmunks and possums. It brought back memories of retrievers of yesteryear. Seems as if it were only a few days ago, instead of two years. Past the Rhodes homestead, and past the last turn to the big wooden sign announcing Harris Hill Soaring Site—and then the road along the lip of the take-off area, with Chemung Valley 900 feet below—a sight to thrill a flat-land Floridian.

Lee Wood was busy with his many duties; the hangar was half full with the local sailplanes which are set up permanently. A few early arrivals were assembling their sailplanes. The landing area, just mowed, smelled like a newly cut hay field.

Every hour or so, another car, sailplane and trailer would drive in, with waves and shouts to old friends. Otherwise, the Hill had the atmosphere of the quiet before the storm.

The weather became overcast, with occasional drizzle. Barney Wiggin, the Meteorologist, said "No Comment". Everyone hoped that this poor day would make for a better flying day to follow. It did.

Paul MacCready arrived by airline from the West Coast, took delivery on a 1-23D at the Schweizer factory, and airplane towed it to the Hill late in the evening.

July 7th dawned clear and crisp. A cold front had passed during the night. There was much activity setting up sailplanes, and the pilots' meeting began at 9:00 A.M. Barney Wiggin opened his weather briefing with a bang—firing a toy cap pistol. And a bang-up day it was, too, with three sailplanes landing at Idlewild Airport and claiming the National Airlines Awards. Stan Smith's greeting by the airport manager at Idlewild was not too friendly, but attention was diverted from Stan when Steve Bennis landed and taxied his sailplane to the ramp and parked between DC-6's. Nick Goodhard, who put in a "sterling" performance during the whole meet, was next into Idlewild, flying an unmodified LK. MacCready, Schweizer and Burr reached similar goals, with Coverdale scoring a near miss near Washington, D. C.

The Contest flights and scores are well described elsewhere. Bob Taylor performed his contest manager duties in fine, efficient fashion, well supported by Miss Jones in the office (how could a contest operate at Harris Hill without Katie?). Don Ryon held forth as contest statistician and drew well deserved praise for his system of flight record-keeping. His wife, Wendy, held down the field operations table on the flight line.

Don devised a rack of vertical, stair-stepped pigeon holes, and when each pilot took off, the pertinent information was written on a card and inserted in the rack, with pilot's name in large black letters. Whenever a pilot's crew called in, notation of crew's location and time was entered on the card. When a pilot called in with his landing report, the information was also entered on the card, pilot was advised of last location and call by his crew, and the card replaced in the rack, reverse side forward, with the name of the pilot written in red letters.

Anyone looking in the office door could tell by the red and black lettering in the rack which pilots were down and which were still airborne.

The distinguished gentlemen from Cornell held forth in the barograph room, and kept barographs calibrated, smoked, and ticking.

Equipment: The contest, and the first four positions at the end, were dominated by the new 1-23D long-wing sailplanes and the one modified 1-21. For the first time in many national contests, the leading competitors were on practically equal footing with regard to performance of their sailplanes.

Stan Smith, with his all-metal dural trailer with helicopter landing gear and wheels, claimed that he often went to an airport near his home and set up his 1-21 alone. To prove his claim he demonstrated all kinds of fancy trailer unloaders, wheel ramps, wing-tip props pullers and pushers. When he started to set up his ship, everyone was convinced he really could do it, but that it would be the hard way, and all pitched in to give him a hand.

Stan modified the 1-21 by lowering the height of the canopy and making the top of the fuselage between canopy



Lou Lowry photo

Capt. F. B. Compton.

and stabilizer practically a straight line.

All the 1-23D's looked good, both in the air and on the ground. The 50-foot span looks like the silhouette of the RJ-5 when flying overhead. Undoubtedly it is the finest production sailplane ever built in this country.

Howie Burr's 1-24 looked equally good, but larger, with greater span, and heavier. It appeared to have outstanding high-speed penetration. Howie finished the sailplane just before the contest, and spent all of the night prior to the first day's flying building the trailer. Then, on his first contest take-off, the tow rope broke just 200 feet off Harris Hill, but he latched onto a thermal and reached his goal at Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Emil Lehecka found an old sailplane in a barn, stored since 1939 but in excellent condition. It has cantilever wood wings, with gull, and wooden fuselage. It is a slow ship, but an excellent thermal climber, and beautiful in flight.

Radio: Radio installations were almost a 100% flop. Paul MacCready had a hastily installed 10-meter amateur band transmitter, but it did not work satisfactorily, and was removed from the sailplane before the end of the contest.

Steve Bennis and Bob Kidder had excellent ground stations in their cars, on 123 MC. Steve's transmitter in the sailplane could be heard only a few miles, not far enough for retrieve work.

Stan Smith's 123 megacycle outfit was not working, or his car receiver was out. His VHF sailplane receiver worked well during the contest.

Instrumentation: Before take-off one day, I quickly looked over the sailplanes, and noted the variometer installations of the leading contestants. The instruments used were, almost without exception, a pellet type variometer plus the very sensitive

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