

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SOARING CHAMPIONSHIPS

by JUNE SARGENT  
*An Amateur but Ardent Observer*

AS I wheeled along in my earth-bound automobile, I watched, marveled, and disbelieved. So we stopped, got out, and cricked our necks at the appropriate angle, gawking with open mouths.

There above us, many hundreds of feet, soaring like a group of graceful hawks, we counted six gliders playing follow-the-leader around and around

ironing out the details as flight manager.

The statistics are interesting — 26 sailplanes on the field, 30 glider pilots registered for competition, a total of 315 air hours during the course of the meet, the services of 4 tow planes, making 175 tows.

The longest straight line flight — 56 miles to Palm Desert; goal and return (source of best point value) — 94 miles to Warner's Hot Springs and return to the Gliderport, a 27-mile

air miles for soaring to a declared goal and return, and for altitude.

A table full of trophies, plaques, and pins, plus the assurance of official recognition for any records made, or requirements met during the meet, lured the pilots into serious competition. Monetary prizes were offered by the Riverside and Hemet Airports for first gliders to set down on their fields — they were willing to pay to be shown.

The pilots included Diamond "C" holders Paul Bikle and Bill Ivans; Graham Thompson, one of Great Britain's outstanding glider pilots; Don Stevens, former stunt pilot and one-time holder of the record for consecutive loops in a glider; visiting but not competing M. R. Liddell, honorary secretary of the Ulster (Ireland) Gliding Club, and America's Betsy Woodward, feminine glider champion, down to look over the possibilities of the area; and a group of soaring enthusiasts and sportsmen from more than 14 Southern California communities who have found Elsinore convenient and well suited for soaring activities.



Elsinore  
Gliderport  
during the  
Champion-  
ships

the edge of the funnel of a thermal. A seventh was about to join them, being towed by plane into the orbit of the lift.

No sound, no confused swishing of props, only the glorious appearance of freedom which communicated itself even down to us there on the ground below.

It happened the second day of the first weekend of the Annual Southern California Championships, and I later learned from the initiated and informed that the thermal in question was familiarly named by those who use the area for their sport — Thermal No. 2. Three other steady and almost completely dependable thermals are spotted around the valley, with a fourth not quite so constant, but available a large part of the time.

The meet was held during two week-ends, the 24th, 25th, and 31st of October, and the 1st of November, in Elsinore, California.

It was under the capable direction of Pete Bonotaux, president of the Elsinore Glider Club, with Johnny Williams, veep of the same group,

Evan Loen  
and Comm.  
Gordon  
Firebaugh  
Present  
Awards to  
Cecil Leshner,  
DeVaughn  
North  
and  
Paul Bikle



precision team flight to Riverside Airport under adverse air conditions.

The meet was arranged under a handicap system to level the differences among the classes of ships in competition. There were three classes: high performance ships, like Paul Bikle's and Bill Ivans's 1-23's; surplus ships, the Schweizer TG-2's and -3's; the babies in the third class.

Points were awarded for spot landings, for accumulation of distance in

Class I winners were Paul Bikle, who received the two-foot Sweepstakes trophy presented by the North Ireland Recreation Association and 1st place in class I, the Gordon Memorial Trophy; Bill Ivans, 2nd — The Ted Nelson trophy; and Bill Bowmar, 3rd.

Class II: 1st to Cecil Leshner, the silver bowl donated by the Helms Foundation; 2nd, Bob Schenbeck, the S.S.A. trophy; 3rd, Tom Clark. Leshner flew a Schweizer TG-2; Schenbeck,