

# WHY ONE-CLASS CONTESTS?

by DICK JOHNSON

There has been and is an awful lot of talk on this subject of one-class competitions. As long as it was only talk and was confined to argument for the sake of argument, I did not give it a second thought. But recently several individuals have seriously advanced the notion that the National Contest should be confined to a one-class competition—and by one-class they do not mean high performance taken broadly. What these persons advocate is more than one-class; they advocate a one-ship competition; namely, the 1-26. I feel that the contestants at the National Contest should still be divided as in the past few years where ships may be entered in various classes representing utilities, surplus ships, and high performance sailplanes. Before I take off on a tangent let us consider why we have national contests and what the national champion should represent.

The one-class competition faction feels that this contest is only supposed to pick out the one man in the United States who can fly the best if he is given equipment as good as every other contestant. I contend that the champion should represent the one person in the U. S. who epitomizes the sport of soaring. By that I feel that he should be a person of flying ability and experience who can make the most of whatever conditions are present. And furthermore, and this is where I differ from the proponents of one-class, the champion should have enough interest in the sport and art of soaring to have equipped himself with a ship which he feels is capable of flying better than any other ship.

But let us get back to the arguments of one-class competition. The proponents of this type of contest feel that the only way to scientifically select the real national champion is to standardize the equipment so as to make everything fair and equal with the pilot as the only variable. Yet they forget that the variable of the weather is impossible to standardize and as long as you have two variables you can prove nothing conclusively — as witnessed in the last Internationals where the difference was often in

who got the take-off at the best time.

The main advantage as I see it that a one-class competition has is that it would be a change, but to me it seems that they argue change for the sake of change. I have also heard said that it would be an economy in that some pilots can not afford to buy or build an RJ-5. Yet these same people who argue this way do not consider the vested interest of those hundred or so who already have ships of one kind or another and do not feel disposed of junking them and buying one like everybody else simply for the sake of competing in a national contest. And where is there a national contest board that can set itself up and say that these pilots can not compete for the national championship because they will not buy a ship as specified?

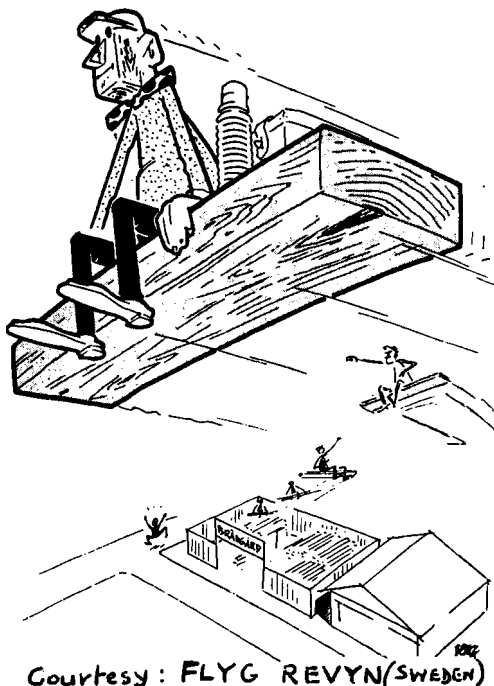
Besides being grossly unfair to everyone who already has a ship, I feel that a one-class national contest would be most uninteresting from year to year. If a group who have ships exactly alike want to get together and try a hot rod contest among themselves, by all means let them do it, but the national contest should be a time to interest the non-soaring public

in the sport. My opinion is that not many people would care to come out and see a lot of carbon copies if they had the choice of seeing a wide variety of models.

The arguments thus far have dealt with the short term impracticality and undesirability of a one-ship competition. But the long term results of such a competition would be devastating to the art and science of soaring. The talk of such a contest alone is enough to discourage many would-be designers from going ahead to design and build new ships. If a new ship has no possibility of being entered in a national competition on a competing basis, why should one go to the trouble and expense of building one? The possibility of records and the interest in the purely scientific aspects of sailplanes is not enough incentive. For example, I have a ship on the drawing board now that is almost ready for the shop, but I am at two minds as to whether it is worth the building if the proponents of one class competition succeed in getting the national championship settled on the basis of who can fly a standard 1-26 the best. And I do not feel that I am the only designer in this situation.

Let us go a little further and suppose that the 1-26 is selected as the ship for the national championship and fifty or more ships are built that can compete. Will the contest always be decided on a 1-26 or will the 1-26 one day be so obsolete as the 1-19? I can only conclude that such a decision would be worse than undesirable. It would be virtual stagnation and the death of soaring on the installment plan. And where now the U. S. trails internationally in the soaring world, in the future there could be no hopes of glimpsing the other nations of the world from the cockpit of the 1-26.

Getting back to the present threat, let me conclude by saying that if one seriously competes for the championship and feels that he can fly farther and/or faster than any other contestant regardless of whether he has a 1-23, a 1-26, or some off-brand of his own contrivance, he certainly deserves the title of U.S. National Soaring Champion if he proves that he can do it.



Courtesy: FLYG REVYN(SWEDEN)