

BRITISH NATIONALS

Lasham, Hampshire, May 9-18, 1959

by RAY YOUNG

"The task of the day for both Leagues will be a goal race to Merryfield," began the briefing on the final day of this year's British Championships. The first eight days had been bright and sunny, with soaring conditions varying from excellent to barely workable, but on this last day, as on the Sunday before, contest flying was called off due to low cloud and strong winds.

Geoffrey Stephenson, electronics engineer, had won by fifteen points (in a 100 point per day system) over Nick Goodhart, the latter well known in American soaring circles. Stephenson, first to soar across the English Channel in 1939 and Champion in 1951 as well, had shown that he and his Skylark 3 sailplane could gain most from the fortunes of the air in this contest.

On the first contest day Nick Goodhart, also flying a Skylark 3, had set a fast pace with a winning goal flight of 360 miles to Scotland. In setting this U.K. distance and goal flight record he had used thermals, cloudstreets, Cumulo-nimbus flying, and waves during his 6½ hour effort. Mrs. Ann Burns, with 283 miles, and Philip Wills, with 272 miles, also towards the north, were second and third, both flying the same types, Skylark 3's.

This successful start was paralleled by another feature of the period, an International Glider Trade Fair, held in one of the Lasham hangars, in which sailplanes, instruments, equipment, and even small powered aircraft were displayed and sold. This innovation drew exhibitors and purchasers, both British and foreign, to the extent that it is intended to be made a regular feature of the Contest.

League 1, compulsory for the experts, international competitors, and aspirants to the Championship, consisted of 35 sailplane entries, some of which were flown by teams of two or three pilots. This was not the only contest however, for League 2, for pilots of Silver C rating or better, without contest experience, and hoping to gain along the way Gold C and Diamond legs, was filled with 42 entries, mostly teams of two or three pilots. Their first day's task, free distance as was League 1's, saw

four pilots reach out to distances between 150 and 175 miles.

These two groups, together 77 aircraft, in one of the largest contest efforts ever held, were launched at better than the planned rate of one each 1½ minute by the squadron of aged Tiger Moths and newer Chipmunks that managed the aero tows. This was only the most apparent aspect of the efficiency and smooth organization laid on by the British Gliding Association and the Lasham Gliding Centre, in most respects equivalent to an international contest organization.

The second day of championship flying called for an out-and-return race of 92 miles. Twelve pilots completed the course, with almost as many landing within walking distance of the finish line. The race went to Tony Deane-Drummond in an Olympia 419, latest model of this type. Tony, defending his title won in the previous contest, was making his bid to keep the cup. Under conditions forecast, the problem was set to make the experts work hard and the beginners think hard, and the contest was generally very well tailored for the day.

On the third day's contest for League 1, Philip Wills in his Skylark 3 won first place by nine minutes advantage over Stephenson in a 122 mile race to the Long Mynd, home of the Midlands Gliding Club and a well known slope soaring center. With this display of Championship form (only the two completed the task), the grand old man of British Gliding departed for Holland as he had planned to fly in their National Contest, which he won!

Deane-Drummond and David Ince, who eventually won third place, both landed their Olympia 419's at the foot of the goal's slope. Others were all along the line, and with League 2 pilots all over the compass in a pilot-selected goal contest, it was a test for the efficiency of the contest control center. Four telephone lines, four positions manned, reporting cards posted at arm's length—pilot reports were quickly recorded, retrieving crew's calls were answered, landing positions were passed to the map posters and numbered pins placed in position. With the last re-

port the score keeper took over with slide rules. Late that evening the score to date was on the blackboard, and in the morning there were breakfast copies of yesterday's results and standings for everyone.

A 100 km. triangle was the order for the next day. It was dry, with no clouds, and a new heat record for the year was set. The calculated changing of the dates for the contest from high summer to late spring was working splendidly on this first occasion. A hazy day, with thermals only to 3,500 feet, but sufficient to let Lorne Welch lead the lot home in 2:17 flying solo in a two-place T-42 Eagle. At day's end the first three places were filled, in overall standing, as the contest was to end: Stephenson, Nick Goodhart, and Ince. For League 2 the eventual winners, Mrs. Rika Harwood, Masters, and Mettam, a lady and two men with a Skylark 3b mount, were already holding first place.

Contest Day 5 saw the League 1 off for distance along a set line, with Derek Piggott (Olympia 403) and Bill Tonkyn (Skylark 3) flying for a tie at 158 miles. The cloudless anticyclonic weather was still holding, making thermals widely spaced and limiting climbs in them to three thousand feet at the most. The day produced the best effort of a new foreign aircraft, the Breguet 905 Fauvette, a vee-tailed 15 meter machine flown by Tony Goodhart, brother of Nick. Tony was learning the capabilities of this beautiful sailplane as the contest progressed. Other foreign aircraft flown included a Polish Jaskolka, a two-place Kranich 2, and two Meise machines, these latter three being German-produced before the last war.

Saturday and the 6th day of Championship flying saw fair weather cumulus in the sky over Lasham. Weary crews were glad to hear the out and return race of 84 miles set for the experts, and those of Andy Gough (Olympia 419) and Deane-Drummond welcomed their pilots home in a tie for the day's honors. It was the best day for the two man team that included an American, C. W. Bentson, U.S. Navy Civil employee and member of the London Gliding Club. They were flying a Sky, a now rather outclassed product of the Slingsby factory.

This proved to be the last contest day, strong winds and low cloud from the North Sea making contests impracticable on the closing Sunday

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