

TAFT 4th OF JULY WEEKEND SOARING CONTEST

Sanctioned by The Soaring Society of America, Inc.

by DAVE MCNAY

The Kern County Airport at Taft, Calif., was the site of a four day soaring contest sponsored by the Taft Chamber of Commerce and The Kern County Soaring Assn. and directed by the Southern California Soaring Assn. The Chambers of Commerce at Paso Robles, Porterville and San Jose offered goal prizes for flights into their areas. Besides providing a local area contest and get-together, this four day contest was designed to give practice to Southern California area pilots who planned to attend the Nationals at Wichita in August. U.S. Nationals Rules were adopted with slight modifications to allow for the reduced number of sailplanes.

Taft is situated at the edge of the rolling hills to the southwest of Bakersfield, Calif., and appears to be ideally located, near the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, for some very good long distance soaring flights to the north and east. It is hoped that as a result of having a contest at Taft more soaring in that area will be encouraged and some of the expected potential realized.

SATURDAY, JULY 1st

The task for the day was set to give each pilot a chance to explore the local soaring conditions and yet keep within easy gliding distance of the many San Joaquin Valley landing fields. A triangle of 88 miles from Taft to Grapevine to Arvin and return permitted contestants to stay with the high ground at the south of the valley and avoid the suspected marginal soaring conditions that prevail in the San Joaquin Valley during much of the summer.

Graham Thomson in his now familiar all-white Ka-6CR and Paul Bikle in the new all-metal Prue Standard roared around the course at average speeds of 21.3 and 18.9 m.p.h. respectively. Although these speeds at first glance appear slow for these champions, the course had a couple of built-in obstacles to make this rather short course more interesting. The second turn, Arvin, is situated about 5 miles west of the foothills which necessitated flying first to the hills behind Arvin and gaining as much altitude as possible

and then, after rounding the turn, returning to the hills to regain sufficient altitude to start back to Grapevine, since it would have almost surely been impossible to complete the last leg of the triangle from Arvin to Taft had a straight line flight been attempted. Sterling Starr in his 1-23D was forced to make his last glide out into the valley in an attempt to get as close to the return leg of the triangle as possible when it became evident that he was not going to make the field at Taft. Ray Proenneke in his slicked up Cherokee II was caught at the Arvin turn with insufficient altitude to return to the hills and landed near the old Arvin gliding site.

First prize for the day was \$10.00 cash donated by Glide Aero Inc. for the fastest time. The prize for second place was three meals at Jo's Restaurant.

SUNDAY, JULY 2nd

During Saturday night, moisture moved in from the southeast creating a near overcast condition at about 10,000 feet. A few large holes in the overcast moved slowly to the northwest and gave hope that sufficient sunlight would reach the hills to make a downwind task possible. Paso Robles, 77 miles to the northwest was chosen as a goal for a race. In order to induce true racing conditions a starting procedure similar to that used at the Elsinore Fall Contest in 1960 was used. Flights were timed from a pass over the field at specified times. With this manner of start pilots could take off early and then choose their starting time in the air merely by planning their pass over the starting line at one of the specified starting times. Nearly all

gliders were airborne before 1:30 and several groups of spiralling sailplanes developed over the oilwell dotted hills behind Taft. As if by command nearly all sailplanes stopped spiralling just in time to arrive over the field at 2:00 to start their time for the race to Paso Robles.

At this time a large hole in the overcast was allowing the sun to flood the parched hills to the northwest with some real thermal producing energy. Graham Thomson followed a flight path to the north of a straight course to the goal in order to stay near the good lift over the Temblor Range of hills until Shandon where he reached an altitude in excess of 10,000 feet before starting his last glide due west to the Paso Robles Airport.

Paul Bikle chose a more direct route to Paso Robles and nearly had to land in California Valley, but at the last minute he caught the much needed lift to save the flight. Paul landed at 4:40 only to find that he was again playing second fiddle. The speed had picked up a little from the first day with Graham completing the 77 miles at a speed of 35.0 m.p.h. and Paul finishing with 28.9 m.p.h.

Ray Proenneke turned in the third best performance for the day by landing some distance short of the goal and just a few miles beyond Jack Lambie who came in fourth for the day.

First prize for the event was a trophy donated by the Paso Robles Chamber of Commerce. Two cash prizes of \$5.00 each were donated by Glide Aero Inc. for the first two gliders to reach Paso Robles. Merchandise prizes were also given for third and fourth places in this event.

MONDAY, JULY 3rd

If no duel was obvious on the first two days of this contest one was certainly in the open on this third day. The weather improved from the previous days and the dawn broke clear after a night with lightning storms moving through the nearby hills.

The task for the day was set to explore the full potential of the hills and valleys to the west of Taft. With the same type of starting procedures as that used on Sunday, the task was to fly twice around a triangle from Taft to New Cuyama to McKittrick and return (total distance 122 mi.).

At 1:15 the always sly but now wiser Paul Bikle made his dash
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