

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SOARING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Part I. TAFT, CALIF.

by DAVE McNAY

The idea of combining several Southern California weekend meets into a multi-part, cumulatively scored contest has been considered several times in the past. This year, the major clubs in the area have undertaken to jointly sponsor a six part contest for the Southern California Championships. For these series of meets, sailplanes will be divided into two general classes: Class I for sailplanes with glide ratios of 25 to 1 and over, and Class II for sailplanes with glide ratios of under 25 to 1. Standard Class, Team, and Two Place performances will also be recognized at the completion of the contest. Each part will be held at various Southern California soaring sites on different weekends throughout the period April through September. The locations and dates may be found listed in the Calendar elsewhere in this issue.

On the weekend of April 24th and 26th, Part I of the Southern California Soaring Championships was held at the airport at Taft, Calif. Arrangements for the meet to be held there were made by the Kern County Soaring Association through Mr. Bill Williams of the Taft Chamber of Commerce.

Arriving participants were greeted by early morning cumulus forming over the hills surrounding the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, indicating good soaring conditions to be expected. By 11:00 A.M., thirteen ships were assembled on the field and the pilot's meeting was held.

The task set for the day was a 227 mile triangular course from Taft northwest along the Temblor range to Coalinga Airport, east across the Valley to the Porterville Airport, and return south to Taft. Moderate N.W. winds were predicted with cloud base estimated to be 8,000 feet. A 1:00 p.m. race-horse start was implemented to



Photo by George Uveges

Mr. and Mrs. Graham Thomson and the Ka-6 at Taft. Victory smiles in anticipation of repeat performance.

add a spirit of competition for the pilots and to provide color for the spectators by having all the sailplanes start with a mass fly-by heading down the first leg.

Fairly strong head winds were encountered along the 88 mile first leg, on this rather ambitious task, after the late start. In spite of the head winds, several pilots made good progress to the first turning point but arrived there too late to make best use of the thermals that were present in the valley during the earlier part of the day.

Graham Thomson, in his Ka 6, landed nearest Porterville followed by Les Benis, Ray Parker and Ray Proeneke, in that order, along the second leg of the triangle. With this 144 mile flight, Graham Thomson earned the 1,000 point top score of the day in Class I. Ray Proeneke's 105 mile flight in his Cherokee II earned him the 1,000 point top score for the day in Class II. Walt Mooney who landed his I-26 at the first turning point was the only other pilot to complete the first leg. The remaining pilots, defeated by the strong head winds,

landed at various points along the first leg.

Most pilots and crews returned to the field in time to attend the dinner arranged by the Chamber of Commerce at a local restaurant. Several of the pilots provided the after dinner speaking by describing the trials and tribulations of their day's flight. Ray Parker's description was typical as he related his struggle with the strong head winds and strong, widely spaced thermals. He said he was able to make his 112 mile flight of the day by staying high and pressing on. Les Benis' only comment was, "I wish it was as easy the rest of the way as it was to the first turning point."

Anticipating strong soaring conditions early again, the Sunday's pilot's meeting was called at 9:30 A.M. A less ambitious 112 mile triangular task from Taft to New Cuyama to Blackwell's Corners and return was assigned for the day. Take off was by pilot's choice with his starting time determined by a flying start across the field below 3,000 foot altitude. No cu's devel-