

## TASK SELECTION

"Task selection for a soaring contest is an inexact science. The problem is confounded in a National Championship by the variety of equipment and the various levels of pilot skill and proficiency (highly skilled pilots may be flying completely new sailplanes). Also, in a country as vast as these United States, there is often a marked change of terrain and of meteorological conditions with each new locale.

"The task selections are influenced by: (1) Rules, (2) Weather, (3) Rules (again), (4) Pilot Performance, (5) Pilot Fatigue, (6) Crew Fatigue, and (7) Several less important miscellaneous factors.

"First, that seldom perused document: Rules for the U.S. National Championships, forms the overall guidelines for the task selections. Both the types of task and their relative distribution are therein delineated. These rules have evolved through several years experience and they specify that the contest should be composed of an approximately equal number of speed tasks and distance tasks. This is the basic philosophy underlying task selections.

"Weather: That often misunderstood individual, the weatherman (or, if you prefer, the met man), is no less misunderstood by the Competitions Committee than the competing pilot. In fact, they may have even more difficulty, for he may be a frustrated task selector and will, unwittingly, shade his forecast to fit his idea of a good task. Some met men, with long experience with meteorological vagaries, speak in a deliberately ambiguous manner. (The forecaster is probably happy to be 80% correct on macro-meteorology and the pilot is unhappy with less than 99% accuracy on micrometeorology.) The Committee must review the weather in all quadrants and make a brief guess at the morrow's picture before considering a task. Weather-data transmission schedules are such that the review of weather, and task selection, must be accomplished in about a 15-minute period.

"As the contest progresses, care must be taken that the distribution of tasks are in accordance with the requirements of the rules. So, not only the spirit of the rules must be considered but the letter as well.

"Pilot performance establishes the overall tone of the competitions. Excellent speeds and good distances on distance tasks press the Competitions Committee to devise even more ambitious tasks. During the recently completed 33rd U.S. Nationals a pilot exceeded the estimated best speed on one task. On the other four speed tasks the committee estimated a faster time than was actually achieved. However, the average difference between estimate and actual was only 9%. On the distance tasks they exceeded twice and fell short twice on maximum anticipated distances.

"When superb soaring conditions exist throughout the competitions it becomes necessary to consider pilot fatigue. Relief can be granted by the



Competitions Committee by selecting comparatively short speed tasks. Such action was necessary in the 33rd.

"Crew fatigue is also a matter of concern, but their relief lies more in the hands of their pilot. Often pilots send their crews far away from base on tasks where the pilot should be expected to return to the point of origin. This, of course, reflects prudent precaution on the part of the pilot, IF he does not expect his crew to follow so close that they catch his wing tip on each landing. Rather, if they are sent only as far as it seems possible, in the event of an early landing, for the pilot to return for a second start before close of the launch line and still have sufficient flight time to exceed the point of first landing, the crew will not be worn out needlessly. Driving beyond that point is wasteful of men, money, and material.

There are other items which play a role in task selection: terrain features will often preclude flights in certain directions; the existence of Restricted Areas can prevent the calling of an otherwise desirable task; on certain courses the lack of accessibility to possible landing sites by retrieve crews restrict the calls; and, to a minor extent, road and traffic conditions are considered.

"Other difficult pressures, which must be resisted at all costs, are those influences caused by such things as pre-planned social events, scheduled meetings, etc. The basic function of the gathering is the competition flying—all other matters must be subordinate.

"The purpose of such a competition is to select the best—in actual fact the best pilot/sailplane/crew combination. To become a National Champion requires all these plus stamina and desire (a touch of luck seems to be of some help). Proper task selection can aid in the naming of a true champion.

"Of course, good task selection involves consideration of all the above factors in the proper proportion. However, it may be suspected that a reliable Ouija Board and a hot planchette are drug out of those mysterious bags carried by Competitions Committeemen once they enter their sanctum sanctorum for that daily séance which brings forth those wretched tasks. Well, after all, tasks must come from somewhere."

—MARSHALL CLAYBOURN