

THE GERMAN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

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The West German National Soaring Championships held at the Otto Lilienthal Luftwaffe Airbase near Roth last May 29 to June 11 marked the coming of age of the fiberglass sailplane. There the new generation of German competition sailplanes, as elegant as any debutants, were introduced to the soaring world. They were flown by fine pilots, competed in an excellently managed contest with a wide spectrum of weather conditions, and waltzed away with the top honors.

The airbase at Roth, with its grass strips and location away from air-traffic zones, is a favored site for German soaring competitions. Upon arrival before the contest, we joined the long line of Mercedes, Opels, and Taunuses hauling sailplane trailers through the main gate. In the cars were the best soaring pilots in Germany which, as Hans-Werner Grosse has demonstrated in his recent American visit, are very good indeed. The sailplanes on the trailers, with their exquisite Wortmann and Eppler profiles and T-, V-, and all-moving tails enticingly shrouded under covers, were the most advanced which West German prosperity, technological skill, and traditional dedication to the sport of soaring could combine to produce. In fact, there had never been a competition, national or international, which could boast such a collection of highpowered unpowered flying machines.

Nearly a third of the sailplanes were of all-fiberglass construction, an astounding indication of how far the fiberglass revolution has already progressed. For the first time the D-36, BS-1, and AS-12 super-sailplanes, the Libelle and SHK would be battling one another in the Open Class. Results in the Standard Class would allow comparison of the K-6E, Phoebus, SF-27, Foka and Edelweiss with the machine that has become the international standard for com-

parisons, the K-6CR. We were understandably eager to witness this test of men and sailplanes.

After the formalities at the gate, we made our way to the tent city which had been erected for contest living and administration. Two sentries with automatic rifles were patrolling outside the Contest Director's tent, and an atmosphere of pre-D-Day tension pervaded the air. Walter Carthaus, the Contest Director, briefed us with the precision of a German Field Marshal. As on D-Day, the weather was very bad and the question on everyone's mind was, how long it would continue bad.

About 40 civilian members of the German Aero Club and 50 military personnel were involved in running the contest. Military pilots flying 10 Dornier DO-27s were responsible for launching. Sailors of the German Navy had brought their optical rangefinders to use for spotting at the start and finish lines. Turnpoints were manned by airmen transported by helicopter. Electronic computers were being used in this contest for the first time. Landing co-ordinates would be determined from large-scale charts at Roth and then teletyped to Munich where Dr. Eppler, at the Boelkow company, would use computers to calculate distances flown and daily scores.

Manfred Reinhard, who was responsible for the difficult and critically important job of task setting, explained to us that the growing trend in Germany away from free-distance and toward goal-and-return and triangle tasks has both theoretical and practical grounds in that performances are less subject to variable meteorological influences, glider concentrations can be restricted to a particular area from which other air traffic can be diverted, and the high cost of gasoline (expensive in Germany) and damaged sailplanes can be minimized. Likewise, the designated-start system in which launching begins at 10 or 11 AM, and the start line is opened one hour later, is favored since variations due to launching sequence are eliminated and pilots can select their starting times after sampling soaring conditions rather than before.

Each German contestant had won the right to participate in this national contest by being at the top in one of the 11 state competitions held last year. Although the United States and several other countries had been invited to send entrants, Claude Gavillet of France, flying an Edelweiss, was the only foreigner competing. Prior to the championships we had had the impression that the Standard Class was dying a slow death and might soon be abandoned altogether in soaring competitions. This, however, is certainly not the case in Germany. Three-fourths of the entrants were flying Standard Class machines and were scored entirely separately from the Open Class. The Standard Class is seen by German pilots as the sporting class as opposed to the experimental Open Class. Interest in the performance of the newer Standard Class sailplanes such as the K-6E, Phoebus, and SF-27 was keen since these machines will soon be in general use in the many hundreds of soaring clubs in Germany, while the superships will not.



Photo courtesy Glasfluegel

Rolf Spaenig, new German National Champion, gets tucked into the pit of the BS-1. Like the heroes of Wagnerian opera, the ship has its own musical leitmotif.