

THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COMPETITION CLUB

By John Williams in conjunction with Helen Dick & Sterling Starr

A unique club in Southern California is active in the development of improved soaring contests and competitors, and results are already distinctly evident! The Southern California Competition Club (called the S3C) has been in operation one year, and can claim the development of a new starting gate which was used with great success at the Reno Nationals, an innovation in turn-point panels (also used at Reno), and experimental results with additional equipment and techniques. Further, member pilots are noting significant improvement in competition-flying skills as experience is gained and ideas are exchanged.

For many years holiday week-end contests have been held in Southern California at various sites and under diverse sponsorship. It has become increasingly evident that contest quality was suffering from organizational inexperience, inadequate ground-support equipment, and a narrow base of skilled competition pilots. To alleviate this problem, Paul Bikle suggested the formation of a group to train ground and airborne contest participants, and to develop equipment. John Williams, working with Paul, organized the Southern California Competition Club and became its first president.

The purpose of the club is fourfold: (1) to develop and improve ground-support equipment for soaring contests (starting gates, turn-point panels, etc.); (2) to increase the proficiency of pilots interested in competition; (3) to train personnel in the organization and operation of soaring contests; and (4) to develop new organizational techniques for soaring contests. Instead of having contests, the group decided to call their operations Workshops, with the number of such events to be determined by the membership. The Workshop is

conducted like a contest, using as a basis the Nationals' rules, and competition is limited to relatively short, closed-circuit tasks. There are no winners nor awards. The Saturday evening of a week-end Workshop is reserved for a dinner at which a critique of the day's flying and ground operations is held. It is used to iron out any problems of the day's task — to be critical or commend, as applicable, the operations and/or flying. The Contest Director for each Workshop is appointed by the president from the membership, and he in turn formulates his Workshop organization. Each competing pilot is required by the by-laws to serve in ground capacities during at least one Workshop each year.

One of the outstanding accomplishments came as a result of the first purpose. This was the development of a sighting device with such accuracy that an instant reading by the start-and-finish-gate operator allows an immediate "go" or "no go" signal to the pilot who has just crossed the gate. This device has been refined over a period of several Workshops, thus eliminating flaws in the system. Since its refinement the gate has been used at the Southern California Regionals, the Marfa Regionals (a drawing was sent to Marfa at their request), and the Nationals at Reno, with excellent results. Other equipment developed, some of which was used at the last Nationals, includes ground communications (field phones and wire for the start/finish gate), identification vests for the operation personnel, turn-point panels (three sets), tow ropes, bulletin and briefing boards, take-off-selection board, and other items necessary for the ground operation of a contest. All this equipment is stored in a small trailer, thus making the equipment portable. The S3C is now

Not only does the S3C have unique contest equipment, but a transport trailer as well! Photo below shows unloading at Lake Elsinore prior to a Workshop. Ted Shirtzinger (right) uses the starting-gate sighting device while Sylvia Colton keeps in touch with home base.

Photos by George Uveges.

