

Once again, the Region 5 North contest was a contest to remember, and the tradition of Carolina soaring, begun decades ago in Chester, continues. Perry International is picture perfect with a 5,000 ft. long runway, beautiful flowerbeds, and blooming dogwoods. It is the home of Al and Rhonda Tyler, who remind us what true southern hospitality is. They graciously invited a full fleet, 65 contestants and 9 guest pilots, for a week of fun and flying. The Tylers show their love for the sport and people of soaring by hosting a contest that has quickly become the first choice of many pilots.

The big news for the first day was the visit to Columbia, SC by President Bush, grounding the fleet until his departure. The launch started the instant the President departed, leaving plenty of time for a task. To everyone's surprise, this day offered 9,000 ft cloudbases and lift to match. The Sports class was given a Modified Assigned Task (MAT). In the FAI classes, turn area tasks (TATs) were called with the Standards heading first to Allendale and then to Edgefield County. The 15 meter class headed first to St. George, a small airport in the low country of South Carolina. Sam Zimmerman, the day's winner at 73 mph, said he could see the boats in Charleston harbour when he turned northwest to the second turnpoint.

The next morning, we awoke to cool temperatures but knew the afternoon would be hot. The competition director, Charlie Spratt, saw a opportunity for big flights and called challenging tasks. The Sports' TAT (nominal 202 mi) included a turn near Laurens, well to the north and not often a turnpoint. The FAI classes enjoyed classic racing flying assigned speed tasks with first turns also to the north, the Standards going to Laurens and the 15 meter going to Spartanburg. Heading to the first turn, there was a large blue hole over Lake Murray, but the aggressive pilots charged across to the clouds on the other side, making good time. Conditions were strong the rest of the day, and winning speeds were better than 80 mph.

Day 3 was forecast to be another booming day, but the day developed late and even as everyone started near 14:00 the clouds were scruffy and the lift a bit weak. As the Standards and 15 meter headed north to their first turns, conditions got weaker and pilots had to tip-toe along. Getting through this stretch in good shape made the day for the fast pilots, who got to the better conditions to the south quickly. Winning speeds were as high as 69 mph. There was good reason to get home quick for an airshow, the Tyler's trademark chicken-on-a-beer, and a concert by Ed Killborne.

Many thought Day 4 would be copy of the previous one. Cloudbase was near 8000' and the lift was strong. Tasks were called closer to home but many managed to fly more than 200 mi, and the winning speeds were above 70mph. Several pilots considered it to be the best day of the contest, hard to believe after so much great soaring. The prize for getting home today was the M&H reception. An approaching cold front was wreaking

havoc out west and there is concern that it may put a halt to a fine week of soaring.

On Friday morning, the cold front is unquestionably on its way; but, it's not scheduled to arrive until after 16:00. There is just enough time for a short task before it comes.

Gridding and launching early, the pilots are quickly out of the gate hoping to make it home before the weather. Bases are low, the lift is much weaker, and a strong pre-frontal wind is breaking up thermals. MATs were ordered up for all of the classes, giving pilots a chance to make their own decisions and handle the front as they could if it arrived ahead of schedule. Things work out fine and everyone was safely on the ground when the front passed at 16:30 bringing hard rain and blowing winds. No sooner is the squall line past than the tents are back up for a Carolina pig picking. All pilots are now back home safe, and we are left with a few hours to enjoy dinner and lick our fingers before another cell approaches.

The morning of the last day, we awoke to very strong winds. Charlie wisely decides not to ruin a great contest and cancels the day. The contest wraps up as we recognize the winners. Winning the 15 meter class is Doug Jacobs, Dale Kramer took first in the Standard class, and Karl Striedeck gets won the Sports class

Hospitality describes Perry best. Splendid southern cooking was the norm. There is no club or commercial operation at Perry but, as they describe it, a loose affiliation of soaring enthusiasts. This group is five or six strong and all make you feel like this is your home port. Good help was recruited including many friends from the Blue Ridge Soaring Society in New Castle, Virginia. Leo Buckley was the scorer and his wife Pat ran the retrieve phones. Lanier Frantz managed an expert gang of tow pilots and with the help of Russell Muschick got everyone airborne in record time.

Al and Rhonda have built a real treasure in their small South Carolina town. A big grass runway surrounded by southern pines, good friends, and good fun are the ingredients for a great contest. If the weather is good, it's even better. I'll say it again --- make your plans early because everyone else will too.