

How to Run a Successful Contest

Written by Daniel Heinrich, 1/17/2006

When I first became a contest director it was because I felt in order to keep having contests to fly in, the hobby needed lots of contest directors to share the duties. In this way everyone would have a chance to compete. When I sat down to organize my first contest I looked at other CD's to see how they prepared in order to plan the best contest possible. What developed over the next 15 years was a series of steps to make each contest run as smoothly as possible. These steps are the same whether you are running a little ½ day meet or a major event such as the Free Flight Championships. Most of the work should be done before the contest and if that is done the CD will have minimal amount of work on the field. Although these steps were written with free-flight contests in mind they will work for any type of contest with minor modifications to suit your particular needs.

Step 1: Set the Date and Flight Schedule

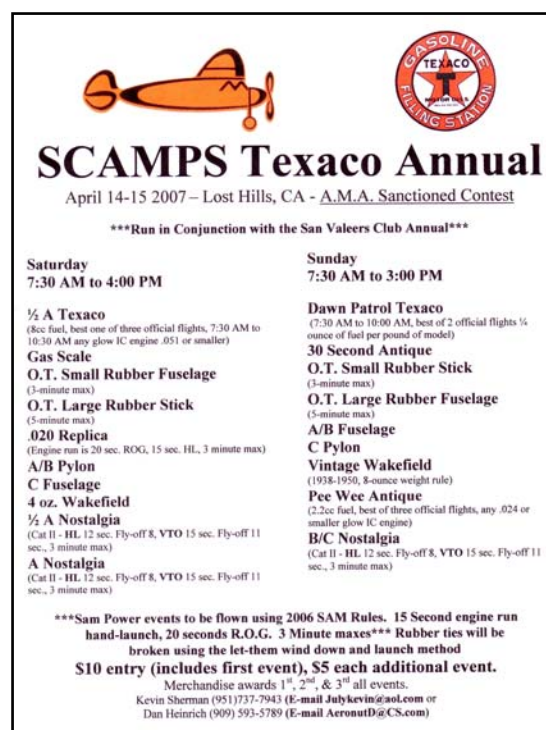
Setting the contest date is usually done at the executive level of the club sponsoring the contest but the flight schedule (aka: Schedule of Events) is always prepared by the CD. This is probably one of the more difficult parts of planning because you have to put yourself in the position of many different fliers in order to have maximum participation in the contest. The biggest consideration is multiple events that can be flown with the same airplane. For example, I flew B and C Nostalgia gas with the same airplane by switching engines from a .29 to a .35. Also, with respect to Old Timers, many fliers will fly C cabin, 30 Second Antique and Texaco or Fuel Allotment with the same airplane so these events should be scheduled on different days. This is not always possible but it should be considered. What some clubs have done to try and alleviate this planning issue is to allow any event to be flown on any day (in the case of multi-day meets). My issue with that is awards ceremonies have the tendency to drag on for a long time, usually at the end of the day when everyone is tired. By having events on scheduled days you can give those awards on that evening and shorten the ceremonies. Awards will be discussed in detail later.

Step 2: Administrative Duties

These should be done as soon as the flight schedule is set and include the following. Apply for event sanction or sanctions if contest is Americas Cup or National Cup contest, secure the flying site (if necessary, this should be done before the contest date is set at the executive level of the club), determine if porta-potties are needed and how many, and promotion of the contest (currently 2 porta-potties are at Lost Hills for all Lost Hills members to use, including for contests).

For the toilets, I usually take the expected number of contestants, double it, and then calculate 1 toilet for every 50-75 people that will be at a contest. For a big meet like the FFC where fliers show up days ahead of time I try to have them there a day or two early and I will usually add one to my calculated total.

Promotion is the key to the success of a contest. The Southwestern (formerly CUFFMAC) calendar is a great tool that is put together every year for the Southwest but you cannot assume that everyone will look at it. It is best to put out a flyer at least 8 months in advance and then a follow up flyer about two months



The flyer for the SCAMPS Texaco Annual contest features a central illustration of a biplane and the Texaco logo. The text provides details for the event on April 14-15, 2007, in Lost Hills, CA, including a list of events for Saturday and Sunday, such as Dawn Patrol Texaco, 30 Second Antique, and various fuselage and pylon events. It also includes contact information for Kevin Sherman and Dan Heinrich.

SCAMPS Texaco Annual
April 14-15 2007 – Lost Hills, CA - A.M.A. Sanctioned Contest

Run in Conjunction with the San Valters Club Annual

Saturday 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM	Sunday 7:30 AM to 3:00 PM
½ A Texaco (8cc fuel, best one of three official flights, 7:30 AM to 10:30 AM any glow IC engine .051 or smaller)	Dawn Patrol Texaco (7:30 AM to 10:00 AM, best of 2 official flights ¼ ounce of fuel per pound of model)
Gas Scale	30 Second Antique
O.T. Small Rubber Fuselage (3-minute max)	O.T. Small Rubber Stick (3-minute max)
O.T. Large Rubber Stick (5-minute max)	O.T. Large Rubber Fuselage (5-minute max)
.020 Replica (Engine run in 20 sec. ROG, 15 sec. HL, 3 minute max)	A/B Fuselage
A/B Pylon	C Pylon
C Fuselage	Vintage Wakefield (1938-1950, 8-ounce weight rule)
4 oz. Wakefield	Pee Wee Antique (2.2cc fuel, best of three official flights, any .024 or smaller glow IC engine)
½ A Nostalgia (Cat II - HL 12 sec. Fly-off 8, VTO 15 sec. Fly-off 11 sec., 3 minute max)	B/C Nostalgia (Cat II - HL 12 sec. Fly-off 8, VTO 15 sec. Fly-off 11 sec., 3 minute max)
A Nostalgia (Cat II - HL 12 sec. Fly-off 8, VTO 15 sec. Fly-off 11 sec., 3 minute max)	

Sam Power events to be flown using 2006 SAM Rules. 15 Second engine run hand-launch, 20 seconds R.O.G. 3 Minute maxes Rubber ties will be broken using the let-them wind down and launch method

\$10 entry (includes first event), \$5 each additional event.
Merchandise awards 1st, 2nd, & 3rd all events.

Kevin Sherman (951)737-7943 (E-mail JulyKevin@aol.com) or Dan Heinrich (909) 593-5789 (E-mail AeronutD@CS.com)

prior. The first will give everyone a chance to build and trim and the second to remind them to put it on their schedules. The easiest and least expensive way to promote is to send the flyer to the club newsletter editors to be included in their monthly newsletters. Remember also that there are many flyers that fly in multiple classes, not everyone just flies Modern, Nostalgia, Old Timer or FAI. A prominent F1C flyer has been known to fly .020 Replica in between rounds and the late Bob White, a world champion Wakefield (F1B) flier, was flying mostly Old Timers the last several years. What I am trying to emphasize is that you should send your flyer to everyone who flies free-flight; you never know who will show up.

Your flyer should include the flight schedule, if any services such as food will be available on the field, and contact information for more information. I also like to include the planned category of the event (Cat I, II, or III). This does not lock you into a certain max time as that can always be altered at the field based on weather or field conditions but it helps the fliers plan and trim to the expected engine runs.

Step 3: Securing Services

This is closely related to Step 2 because now you are going to use the information you calculated. Call the food service (if one is to be arranged) provider with at least 8 months notice to arrange for them to be on the field. Have information such as how many people are expected, days of the contest, and the hours of the contest. Keep in mind that they need to make money and may not always be willing to stay on the field all day. A good solution to this is to contact a lunch truck company and have them show up a little before lunch. Usually these companies have lower overhead and no set up time so they can show up at the smaller meets and keep everyone fed.

Next, if you need them, call the porta-pottie company and find out what kind of lead time they will need to supply the toilets. Make sure they know exactly where the field is. I recently had the experience of a company wanting to send the toilets to Taft when the contest was at Lost Hills. Often sending a map will clear up any confusion.

Step 4: Preparation

This can be done a little at a time so you do not feel overwhelmed by all the tasks. For this step you will be gathering all the materials you will need on the field like time cards, event sheets, AMA Form 11 (one copy is sent with sanction, have 4 or 5 on hand), and current rules for events being flown. This is also the time to get prizes.

Time cards can be copied from examples from other clubs and I like for them to be printed on card stock. As you are doing two or three per sheet it usually does not cost much for the cards to be copied and cut at a local copy house. Colors are the same price and always look better, plus they are easier to identify. They should include the event name, contestant name, number (if applicable) and AMA number, and I like to have the model name and engine size (a good idea to make sure they are flying the correct model in the correct event). There should be entry boxes for engine run, flight time, timer initials and CD initials. Rubber and Glider fliers do not need all these boxes but it is easier to keep things basic. I carry the number of flights down as much as the card will hold and still be easy to write in the boxes, usually around 10 or 12 flights. Better to have too many available than too few.

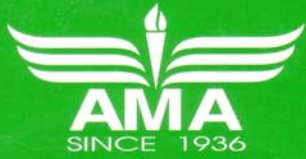
Event sheets need only to have the contestants name and a block for each flight. Some CD's like to carry over a running total of flight times after each

United States Free Flight Championships

Name _____
 AMA # _____
 Event _____
 Model _____
 Engine _____

	Eng.	Flight (seconds)	Timer	CD
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

Please turn in times after each flight.
 Times not recorded on completion of flight
 will be scored as a 0 (zero) for that flight.



Competition Regulations 2002—2004

Rules Governing Model Aviation
Competition in the United States
\$2.50

ACADEMY OF MODEL AERONAUTICS
5161 East Memorial Drive
Muncie, Indiana 47302

At least a week before the contest put all of the things you will be taking in one area and inventory them to make sure you are as prepared as possible. I find a checklist is helpful to verify what you have and what you need and make sure to include comfort items for yourself and any assistants you may have at the contest table. I always take- in addition to the time cards, event sheets, Form 11's, application for AMA membership, prizes and event sanction- the following: First aid kit, 5 gallon drinking water cooler and cups, shade canopy, chairs, tables, extra toilet paper, pens (black ink, red ink for maxes, and a felt tip marker for signs), blank paper, a sheet with engine run times, maxes and fly off times (if applicable), and a cell phone with local emergency numbers and a charger. It is also a good idea to bring jumper cables, some basic tools, a tire pump, and some snacks and drinks for the CD table. Not all of these things are necessary but I have found need for any or all of them at different contests.

It is my opinion that a contest director should be at or around the table at all times. The CD is the final authority at a contest and should be available to answer questions and make decisions about events that may occur. This often means that the CD will not be able to participate in the contest. I have been able to sneak away to fly a single flight event or night flying but 99% of the time you will find me at the table. You can sneak away to grab some food or go to the bathroom but again, the CD is the manager and should be

locatable at all times.

I total flight times when all flights have been flown for an event. Other CD's like to have a running total so fliers can see how their times stack up against everyone else in the event. This method does not always apply, like for Hand Launched Glider or Catapult where the flier is given 6 launches to try and get 3 maxes. Sometimes you do not know which flights will be the official ones. Again, do what you feel comfortable with. Most CD's use the convention of writing maxes in red ink. In this way it is easy to see who has posted how many maxes at a glance and enhances competition. By totaling as you go there will be less to add up at contest close.

Have your awards staged at least an hour before you plan to give them out. Fliers always want to see what they could win and it encourages them to stay for the awards. Try to have everything totaled before the close of flying and placing established. This way you can give out awards as soon as flying has concluded.

If you are giving out trophies it is easiest to go event by event and give out all places in the event. If merchandise is the award, it is most fair to start with the event with the most contestants and go through to the event with the least contestants giving all the first places, then the seconds, and so on. Most contests only give awards to 3 places but if you have enough budget to give more and contestants to warrant it then you can go to 5 or more. I like to give trophies out the same day the event is flown to keep the awards ceremony short but with merchandise prizes it is most fair to give all the awards on the same day.

Step 7: Closing Out

Prepare a contest report to be published in your club newsletter. Include as much information as you like but at a minimum it should list the event name, the first three places and the total flight time for each place. Some CD's like to include the information about the model which makes for more interesting reading. Do not forget to send the completed contest report to AMA within 1 week of the end of the contest. AMA has a form to fill out which is included with the event sanction and can also be downloaded off the AMA website.

Many people are not sure how to run a contest but would like to learn. These 7 steps, though not all inclusive for all events, are a good guideline for how to run a successful contest. When in doubt ask other members of your club for advice. One thing to remember, you will get several opinions on the same subject. When in doubt consult the rule book or do what you feel most comfortable with. The key is to be consistent. Even if you make a bad decision, if it cannot be corrected simply apologize and say that you have to keep it the same for everyone. You are not going to make everyone happy, accept it and do the best you can. Just remember, you are a volunteer and if they do not like the way you run it they are welcome to run it next time. This usually ends all arguments. Above all else remember my motto:

If you are not having fun, you are doing it wrong!