

of aircraft components, collector of flying antiques and patron of the aeronautical arts. Normal activity was halted for a week and the 150 light aircraft based at Oak Grove sat quietly while a gaudy array of homebuilts, antiques and limited-production types took over.

For the second year running the meet was divided into Primary, Advanced and Unlimited divisions, with pilots generally free to choose their division. Major interest was, of course, centred on the Unlimiteds, where three former national champions and four US team members were among the 14 men and three women who entered. Just five competed in the Advanced division, but the relatively new Primary division attracted 32 fledgling aerobats, making a total of 54.

The rivalry between those favouring monoplanes and those favouring biplanes remained hot throughout the week and was not at all settled by the final results. Half the 14 male pilots chose biplanes (six Pitts Specials and one hefty PJ-260), while the other half preferred cleaner monoplanes (three modified Chipmunks, two in a Zlin 526F and two in the Spinks Akromaster). Final positions were almost evenly distributed.

The favourites

There were perhaps four favourites before the meeting:—Bob Herendeen, flying the Pitts Special which had carried him to within grasp of the 1968 World Championship, only to have the meeting ended prematurely; Charlie Hillard in the still-new Spinks Akromaster, developed expressly for competition at an estimated cost of \$150,000 (£60,000); Art Scholl, in his 260 h.p., retractable-gear "Super Chipmunk"; and Jiri Koblre, twice Czech National Champion, in a new 180 h.p. fuel-injection Zlin Akrobat. Given an excellent chance to break into the top bracket was 21-year-old Gene Soucy who, like Herendeen, was flying a competition Pitts Special equipped with symmetrical-section wings and four ailerons.

Despite a cold wind and solid overcast skies, the meeting started out on schedule with the known obligatory sequence, which the contestants should have been practising for many months. Herendeen immediately took the lead, but by a mere 121 points out of almost 20,000. Art Scholl was second, 600 points ahead of Olin C. "Buddy" Head, an airline pilot flying a stretched Pitts. Head, in turn, led young Soucy by just 10 points, while Hillard was sixth and Koblre eighth.

The second day's challenge was the first of two free sequences. Herendeen again won, this time topping runner-up Hillard by almost 400 points, with Art Scholl third for the day, but remaining second overall, trailing Herendeen by more than 750 points. Hillard moved up from sixth to third, while Koblre, by getting fourth place, climbed from eighth to fifth in the accumulated scores. Head dropped to fourth and Soucy to sixth.

By just about any accounting, the unknown obligatory sequence was the most difficult, for the pilots had but 24 hours to study it, and no opportunity to practise. Experience pays off, along with the ability to relax in the face of adversity—which comes, if ever, with maturity. This was the task for the third day and marked the occasion of the first major blunder. Gene Soucy, doing well in his first national event, had concentrated so heavily on the series of manoeuvres that he forgot to check his fuel supply before take-off. As machines will, his Pitts quickly notified him of the omission by rudely sputtering and popping. After completing only a few manoeuvres, he was forced to land; this mistake dropped him from sixth to thirteenth place and put him effectively out of the running.

For the third consecutive day, Herendeen came through on top, and this time in such convincing style that the meet could have been ended in full confidence that the true winner had been determined. He was more than 1,000 points ahead of Koblre (by this time known as "George"). Art Scholl barely hung onto second place after coming sixth for the day as the result of taking two full turns in a spin manoeuvre which called for just one. At the end of three days, Herendeen led Scholl by almost 3,000 points (out of more than 70,000), while Scholl led Charlie Hillard by a mere 26½ points.

The final day, scheduled for a repeat of the free sequence, was delayed several hours by low ceiling and poor visibility, and then delayed further while the aerobatic zone markers

and officials were shifted to the other side of the airfield where the noise of straining engines would not disturb a sick neighbour. When it finally was flown, the fourth and last sequence was won by Bob Herendeen, who thus became the first pilot to win every sequence in a major American meeting. Among his rewards were a trophy and \$2,200 (£900) from the Aerobatic Club of America, a magnificent hand-blown glass vase from the Czech Aero Club, and a guaranteed spot in the US team for the 1970 meet.

While Herendeen finished with an unchallengable lead of more than 4,000 points, a great battle was waged for positions two-to-five. Art Scholl captured third place on the final day and second overall. Buddy Head made a dash at the finish, gained second place for the day and a surprising third for the meet, less than 500 points behind Scholl. Charlie Hillard "blew" a couple of manoeuvres, was placed sixth for the day and dropped to fourth overall, just 800 points behind Head. Koblre, meanwhile, was fourth for the day, yet dropped to fifth overall, only 400 points behind Hillard.

In the women's section of the Unlimited division, twice National Champion Mrs Mary Gaffaney had no serious competition, outdistancing her rivals by tens of thousands of points. She flew a competition Pitts Special and, with Herendeen, qualified for the 1970 US team. Other members will be selected at a special meeting to be held at Oak Grove in May, 1970.

And so the championships ended. Despite frequently threatening and occasionally delaying weather, everything was run to schedule. Both Unlimited sections were won in convincing style by Pitts Specials, but the men's division saw monoplanes threatening at all times. From Texas it was back home for a winter of repairing, modifying, improving. As soon as spring arrives, practice will begin in earnest for the team selection in May. And finally, "On to Hullavington!"

DON BERLINER

BRITAIN

PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD Aerobatic Competition, to be held in England for the first time next year, has dominated the 1969 aerobatic season. Although there have been only two competitions suitable for the participation of the British team its members have been training every weekend in the hope of attaining a world-beating standard. The purposeful roar of Zlin aircraft over one of the many training sites is proof of the team's intention to maintain the tradition that the home side wins the championship. At the same time other pilots have been competing in the national competitions, held in Britain every summer.

One of the major obstacles to general aerobatic training in this country is the difficulty in acquiring suitable mounts. Few aircraft are designed to withstand the loadings imposed by the most advanced manoeuvres. Basic requirements for such figures as outside loops, negative flick rolls and multiple vertical rolls are stress limits of +6g to -4g, and fully inverted fuel and oil systems. The most widely used aircraft is the Czechoslovakian Zlin 526 Akrobat, a derivation of the original Zlin two-seat basic trainer. The Akrobat's robust construction, retractable undercarriage and constant speed propeller has made the single-seater into the winner of many World Championships.

Although the Zlin has the monopoly in this field at present, it may soon be superseded by more specialised designs. At the 1968 World Championships held at Magdeburg, East Germany, the American pilot Bob Herendeen took third place in a modified version of the famous Pitts Special. Next year, one of the American team will be flying an entirely new aircraft, the "Pappy" Spinks Akromaster. Named after its creator, it has already been flown by Neil Williams, chief consultant to the team working on Britain's own design, the Cranfield project.

The British team currently flies a Zlin 526 Akrobat and a two-seat Trener-Master. The latter was presented by Players and bears the colours of their Gold Leaf brand. It was delivered in time to prepare for the 1968 championships although it was not flown at the contest. In March 1969 the first steps were taken towards expanding the team flying the