

The First World Champi

For the first time, they came from all over the world with their sailplanes—and Skip Miller and the U.S. team came out on top/**Meesh Rheault**

At 7 a.m. Colorado time, on March 18, 1977, Skip and I began our long journey to South Africa to the First World Championships of RC Soaring. Sliding into New York through a thick fog we were met by Dan Pruss, our team manager, team member Dale Nutter and his wife Betty. Once at the South African Airways terminal we joined Lemon Payne, our no. 1 team member and Dave Thornberg field support crew/handtower and backup flier. Having checked Skip's sailplane coffin and our luggage, we retired to the Monarch Lounge to wait out our three hour layover. There we met Rick Reuland from Montreal, of the Canadian team.

The trip to S. Africa via 747 SP was unbelievably long and grueling. In a perpetual state of exhaustion; fading in and out of consciousness, we were fed gourmet meals and shown a movie. Only 19 hours later we landed in Johannesburg, S. Africa, where, with an 8 hour time change, it was evening. We were met by an enthusiastic entourage of S. Africans, who hefted our enormous quantities of baggage and sailplane crates and drove us into

Pretoria to the 4-star Burgerspark Hotel, where all connected with the World Championships would eventually meet.

After a needed night's rest Skip and I wandered around the town and through the exquisite Burgers Park filled with flowers and palm trees. For lunch we were driven out to the Pretoria Radio Flyers Field. I cannot describe how perfect a place for enjoying RC power and gliding this was. Complete with spacious clubhouse, pool, control tower, bar, ice, shade, asphalt runways, steaks & chops on the grill, lounge chairs, mowed lush grass; they had made R/C flying an event that all members of the family enjoyed being a part of.

Practice

On Monday, Dan rented a VW microbus and the team spent the better part of a morning figuring out the fine points of fitting 7 bodies, 9 gliders, 9 transmitters, a winch and who knows how many histart rubbers into a bus. After jockeying around it was finally packed and the U.S. team and supporters headed out to day one of practice. The field was at Swartkops Airforce Base in Verwoerdburg about four miles from our hotel and in general was a very satisfactory flying site.

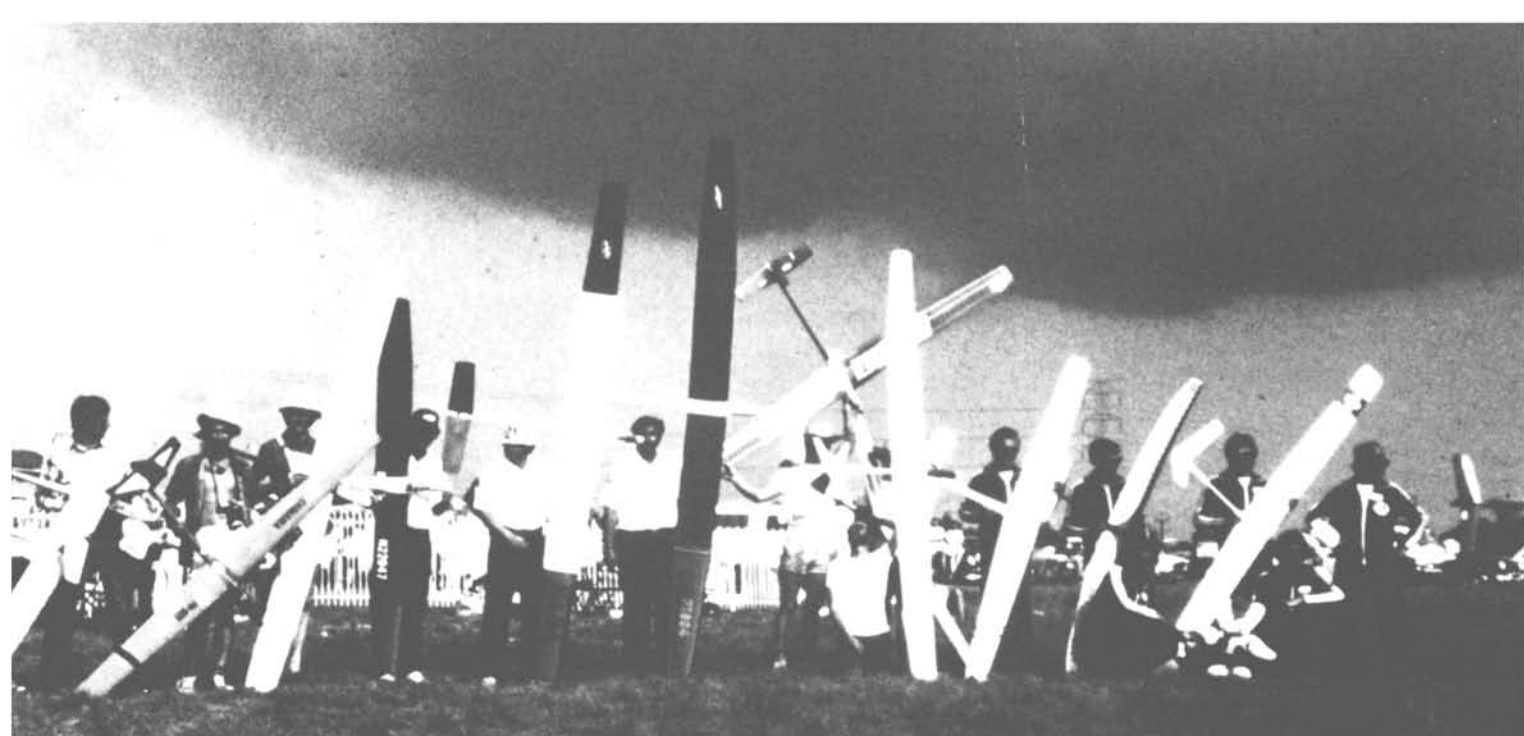
The Canadian and Australian teams were out practicing as well as Ralph Decker, European champion of Munich, Germany and his beautiful wife Galinda. The day was going well and Lemon had gotten his no. 1 ship trimmed and flying perfectly when, in a high speed pass, his vertical fin ripped off and his beautiful Legionnaire was destroyed. This was not the only tragedy of the day. Ralf Decker had brought a sailplane of his own design, which many described as ten years ahead

of its time, having simultaneously adjustable airfoil, flaps and ailerons and a fully fiberglassed foam wing with carbon fiber bracing. He too went for a high speed run when his wings began to flutter and literally exploded in the air. Two of the finest ships to appear at the World Championships had been reduced to pieces.

As the practice wore on (and Dave Thornberg wore out; he would run as many as fifty consecutive handtows in a day!) the team sharpened their skills and strategy. Dan Pruss with unending energy, flagged chutes, timed speed runs, counted down spots. His watchful eye formed criticisms essential to the perfect completion of a task. Dave Thornberg approached each handtow with utmost concentration and energy. The tows were consistently high.

We were never alone out there. There was a constant audience and clicking of stopwatches as other countries took note of the smooth United States teamwork. A combination of practice and pressure saw incredible improvement in all three fliers. In speed alone the transformation to competitive flying was amazing.

Sunday night found a slight panic rustling through the teams; it seemed there were to be a few rule changes only 40 hours before the start of the Championships. After a few protests were lodged, winch length was resolved once and for all at 150 meters without ratchet and histart length was affirmed at 150 meter relaxed length with limited stretch on the ground to 200 meters. Fortunately these were the rules the U.S. team had been practicing under as had everyone for the last few months and any change at this late date could have been detrimental to all.



Relationships of R/C Soaring

Dress rehearsal

Monday was intended to be a full round, all three tasks, with competitors going through the expected routine at contest pace. Unfortunately there was only one bell for the distance course so only one flyer could be on the course at a time. The practice dragged a bit, stopped dead for 45 minutes due to a wind shift and finally was arrested before half had gotten through the second task.

Everyone then spent the rest of the fading afternoon sun getting winch, hand-tow and highstart lines officially measured by Nord Guerneke. It had taken 7 hours to run a third of a round. I reflected on the contrasts: Hewlett Packard had provided, free of charge, a magnificent frequency control monitoring device complete with manpower to run it, as well as a fantastic computer to figure out scores and read-out results; and here we were with a common door bell to signal turns for speed and distance.

We headed back to the hotel hoping that tomorrow would bring us luck and trusting that Jack Abbott, contest director would find another signalling device to help the distance task run more smoothly.

The competition Round 1

Tuesday morning the competition began. What we had all traveled so far to be a part of was finally underway. Present were twelve countries and 34 contestants with their various team managers, field crews and supporters.

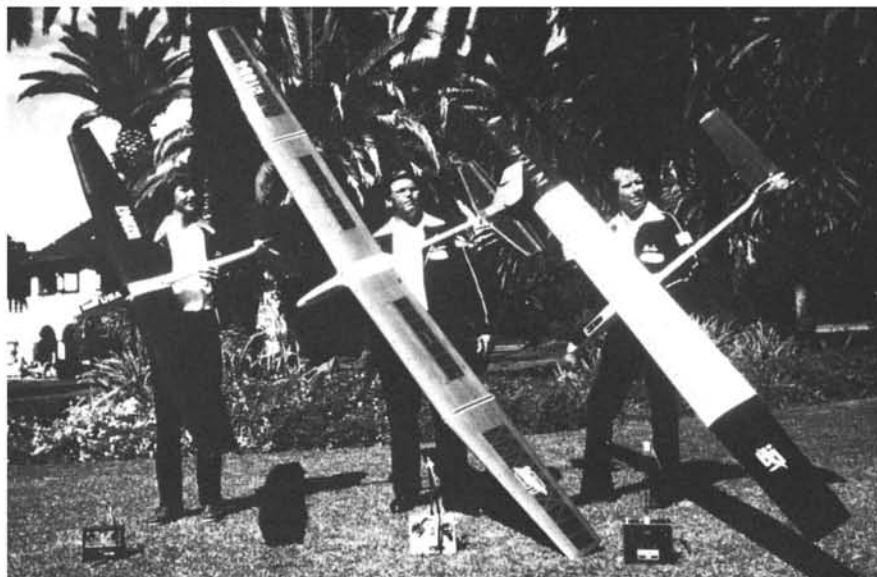
Six minute duration/precision was the first task to be flown; and already there was a problem. Marking the six spots were inflated beach balls, which

when approached by a high-speed landing cushioned the plane for a stop right at the spot. There were many complaints that this was like stopping a plane with one's foot and by the next round the balls were deflated. Julius Topf of Canada won that task with a near perfect score one second off six minutes at the spot. Lemon Payne and Skip Miller were not far behind.

In the distance task Sean Bannister of the United Kingdom began showing his

talents by flying 16.73 laps. Both O'Shea of the U.K. and Roos of South Africa attained 15 laps. Bannister had established a pace which everyone strove to maintain, and when Lemon Payne flew, he knew he needed to find lift to match the laps. Luck was someplace else that moment and Lemon fell out having found nothing but super sink. The speed task found Lemon as persistent as ever, even knowing this would be a "throwaway round," to show

PHOTOGRAPHY MEESH RHEAULT



The United States' team took first place in the First World Championships of R/C Soaring. The team consisted of, left to right, Skip Miller and his Aquila, Lemon Payne and his Legionnaire, and Dale Nutter with his Grand Esprit. Skip Miller took home the first place individual trophy.



Skip Miller, of Boulder, Colorado, is shown here launching his modified Aquila on his way to winning the first place spot as R/C soaring champion of the world during the competition in South Africa.

everyone how smooth and fast a sailplane can go. With a beautifully anticipated turn, Lemon ran a 12.8 second speed for 1000 points. By the end of Round 1 Frikkie Roos of S. Africa stood first, Sean Bannister, K.U., second, Joris Tenholt, Netherlands third, Ralf Decker, Germany fourth and Skip Miller a comfortable fifth. In Team standings the U.S. took the lead from round 1 and never gave it up. At the end of the round our nostrils were greeted by the smells of a S. African Braais (pronounced Bry) which consisted of grilled steaks, chops and sausage. By now I had figured out their strategy: feed us till we couldn't fly! This was the official ceremony to open the First World Championships of RC Soaring and we were honored with a few speeches and a lot of food.

Let me digress a moment and describe

the fantastic accommodations provided for the Championships. Most obvious on the scene were three giant blue and white circus tents. In one you could, at your leisure, retire for a few moments to enjoy a six course hot meal served by a myriad of friendly women who had been cooking up homemade breads and pies since six A.M. An enormous improvement over our usual stale sandwich in the hot sun! A 12x15' scoreboard made the standings of both team and individual easy to assess. Master of Ceremonies Brian Dawson gave a constant report which was broadcast to the crowd over a loudspeaker, and thus the sometimes difficult to understand FAI tasks were enjoyed by the crowds in the bleachers and all around. There were programs available with photographs and vital statistics of all contestants, team man-

agers, field crew and officials with a humorous description of FAI and a score sheet in back for anyone to keep track of who was beating who. The weather couldn't have been more beautiful, 80-90° and sunny with spectacular low cumulus clouds.

Round 2

Day two began an hour earlier with the duration task. The first group all launched except Topf of Canada, who was waiting for the official winch to be repaired. All fell out except Topf who attained another near perfect score. Skip Miller hit the spot at exactly six minutes for the first perfect duration and 1000 points. Midway through the task, team managers for the U.K. and Netherlands registered a protest, essentially demanding a reflight on the grounds that Topf did not launch with his flight group. The reflight was granted and Topf was forced to re-fly with his group, losing his good score. Even with a reflight, Bannister, U.K. and Tenholt, Netherlands did not improve their scores.

The distance began with Bannister again setting a pace, this time running 15 laps. Soon afterwards Skip Miller and Frikkie Roos, S. Africa launched and in the same air, Frikkie got 11.73 laps and Skip 17. Skip's prowess for running distance was apparent and his 17 laps gave him his second 1000 points for the round and held the record in laps for the next two rounds. Dale Nutter flew a fantastic 16 laps showing how far he's come since the Denver finals! Lemon Payne flew 13.6 laps for 800 points but damaged his stab on the landing, a fate which was to cost him many precious points later.

By late afternoon when the speed task was to be run it had become fairly windy and times were much slower. Mattingly of the U.K. turned a 14.2 seconds for 1000 points. Lemon's stab, thought to be completely repaired, fluttered badly causing him to slow down for a 17.8 second run. Skip's 15 second speed gave him 947 points and at the end of round 2 he had an amazing 2947 points out of a possible 3000; the best score for a round for the entire contest! At this point Skip's name went to the top of the scoreboard where it was to remain for the rest of the competition.

Wednesday night found our handsome U.S. team looking well in their navy blazers, ties and white slacks at a cocktail party given by the mayor of Verwoerdburg. As in everything they do the S. Africans outdid themselves again with the most elegant hor d'oeuvres arranged in shapes of boats, chariots pulled by lobsters and castles that we'd ever seen.

Round 3

Thursday was to be Stephan Smith of Australia's day. In duration he took 1st with a 100 point landing only 5 seconds off. Dale Nutter was only a second behind. In distance Stephan turned 16.4 laps for his second 1000 points. But for many distance would be their nemesis. Ralf Decker, Germany, looking for lift in an attempt to match Smith's score fell out after less than 2 laps. Out of 34 fliers only six achieved over 10 laps, the rest averaging six or less. As always, luck was playing its part. For Skip's distance attempt he elected to use a specially designed histart for wind. Up

till now all three U.S. fliers had launched using handtows given by Thornberg. The wind seemed strong enough to chance it and though Skip was bound by FAI rules to launch at 200 meters limited stretch on the ground; he was planning to use the wind to stretch beyond 200 meters to achieve a higher launch.

As Skip thrust his Aquila into the air my heart sank. The wind died. For four agonizing minutes Skip played the histart out, making six passes no more than ten feet from the ground. His capture towhook engaged, he was almost forced to land, as the chute opened once and Thornberg saw the rubber even go limp. After not breathing for what seemed an eternity, the wind finally blew just barely enough to give Skip a 150 meter launch. After a launch like that, 8.33 laps seemed like a gift. I felt as if I'd aged ten years in those few minutes.

Speed saw another near tragedy for Payne as his stab fluttered again and resulted in an 18.1 second run. Bannister, U.K. took 1000 points with his 12.8 second speed. Nutter flew his fastest speed of the competition, a 14.6 and Skip duplicated it showing his consistency. Peter Keim of Netherlands dove off too much height in his approach and touched ground before finishing the course resulting in a zero. Tenholt, another Netherlands team member consistently scoring in the top ten, flew his best speed, a smooth 13.5 seconds.

Round 4

In an attempt to hold six rounds in 5 days Thursday was to be a long day and we prepared to begin round 4 by launching a second speed run. Having changed planes Payne dove through an incredible 12.7 second speed to further demonstrate his skill in speed. Miller flew a smooth 13.6 second and Nutter a steady 15.1. Eugenio Pagliano of Italy lost his stab during the flight resulting in a zero for the task.

By the time duration was to be flown, the long day was beginning to take its toll. Pilot after pilot fell short in both landing and time. The sun sank lower and the last flight group launched. Skip Miller in the last group, thriving under pressure, attained a perfect score in duration once more, for 1000 points.

Friday morning, being April Fool's Day, Thornberg faked a fall for Pruss' benefit and in the process cracked a rib. Being the trojan he is he continued unflinchingly to give the highest, most polished handtow launches of any helper there.

The distance task needed to finish round 4 was the first order of the day and Skip Miller's flight group was first. O'Reilly of Australia amazed everyone by flying 18 laps for 1000 points. Though Skip only flew 15, it was enough to win the round and keep him on top. Payne had still more bad luck; a knot in the towline slipped out, and with a very low launch he could only fly three laps. Nutters consistent 13 laps kept the U.S. team "in the money."

Round 5

The next task flows was another distance and Laderach of Switzerland with his Hobie Hawk, launched into an incredible "boomer." For 16 laps the Hobie Hawk stayed literally a dot in the sky. Nutter and Miller eeked out 12 laps each

Team Positions

1. U.S.A.	35579
2. U.K.	34489
3. Australia	34359
4. Netherlands	33462
5. Germany	32618
6. South Africa	32521
7. Switzerland	31367
8. Belgium	28915
9. Italy	28267
10. Canada	27929
11. Luxembourg	26351
12. Austria	7007

Individual Positions

1. Skip Miller	U.S.A.	13185	Aquila modified
2. Frikkie Roos	S. Africa	12919	Jonathan (Own Design)
3. Sean Bannister	U.K.	12844	Algebra VI (Own Design)
4. Joris Tenholt	Netherlands	12508	Alba 2
5. Mike O'Reilly	Australia	11960	Altos (Own Design)
6. Stephan Smith	Australia	11855	Own Design
7. Ralf Decker	Germany	11829	Own Design
8. Dale Nutter	U.S.A.	11702	Grand Esprit
9. Neville Mattingly	U.K.	11343	Vega Beta (Own Design)
10. Friedholm Schiborr	Germany	11106	Own Design
11. Lemon Payne	U.S.A.	10692	Legionnaire
12. Gerhardt Laderach	Switzerland	10659	Hobie Hawk
13. Eddie Meester	Australia	10544	Super Alpha
14. Rudi Baumhartner	Switzerland	10523	Brilliant V modified
15. Roy Spavins	S. Africa	10510	Yellow Bird (Own Design)
16. Bene van Leeuen	Netherlands	10489	Bommel IV (Own Design)
17. Peter Keim	Netherlands	10465	Chaimara (Own Design)
18. Tony O'Shea	U.K.	10302	Halton Special mk II
19. Willem van der Meulen	Belgium	10194	Kwibus (Own Design)
20. Paul Gassman	Switzerland	10185	Windspiel modified
21. Willy van Nuffel	Belgium	10181	Wildflecken
22. Paolo Casadei	Italy	9761	Vagabond (Own Design)
23. Albert Saager	Germany	9683	Own Design
24. Rick Reuland	Canada	9679	Super Cirrus
25. Jean-Paul Greis	Luxembourg	9623	Westwind
26. Jack Humphreys	Canada	9621	Alpha MK III
27. Franco Givone	Italy	9504	Own Design
28. Noel Drew	S. Africa	9092	Kwibus (Own Design)
29. Eugenio Pagliano	Italy	9002	Vevi 75 (Own Design)
30. Julius Toef	Canada	8629	Maestro
31. Marcel Kemp	Luxembourg	8599	Brilliant
32. Andre Gouverneur	Belgium	8540	Own Design
33. Romain Sfredda	Luxembourg	8129	Brilliant
34. Hans Wasner	Austria	7007	Cumulus

in marginal lift but Payne launched into an endless downer. Even his 2.8 laps were painfully difficult to achieve.

The case for flying 6 at a time and normalizing their scores becomes stronger each time I watch a distance task being flown. It has so much luck tied to it, and yet the skill of one pilot flying 16 laps and another 10 in the same air is evident and indicates that the task should not be abandoned but rather amended to be more fair!

Speed was the next event and again Payne showed his virtuosity by recording a lightning fast 12.4 seconds run. His anticipated turns were improving even as his luck did not. Drew of S. Africa flew his best speed, a 13.0 flat. Miller and Nutter both flew 15.8 seconds showing consistency to be a winning formula in keeping the

U.S. team on top. Keim, Netherlands, made an error in judgement on the turn which caused him to crash and damage his plane quite seriously.

Duration, all that was needed to finish round 5, was the last task to be flown. Slowly the clouds had gathered and the air chilled. A cold drizzle began during Miller's flight group and he fell out at 5 minutes and 15 seconds at 1 meter for 912 points. Payne in his unshakable style was 5 seconds short at 1 meter for 1000 points.

During the last flight group of the day, it began to rain unmercifully. Even during the blinding downpour that ensued; Mattingly, U.K., maxed for 980 points. Even Keim, Netherlands, who was flying his battered Chimaira (own design), barely held together with tape and scraps of plywood; managed 5 minutes and 45

seconds; though no spot. So with these flights Jack Abbott, C.D. knew there could be no quibbling for a reflight.

Friday night after long hot baths we met with a large group of S. Africans and other sundry folk we had invited to share dinner with us in thanks for their hospitality. Having developed a fondness for Walt Schroeder M.A.N. editor, who saved the day for me by buying me a camera battery when I couldn't leave the field, I enjoyed sharing in conversation with him and Jack Abbott. Though many were already extending congratulations to Skip, neither he nor the team was going to slack off at this point, and so, it was another early to bed night to prepare us for the inevitable tensions that greet everyone on the last day of the competition.

Round 6

Even though Skip had no real "throw-away" round yet, Bannister U.K. was breathing down his neck and this day promised to be just as gripping as the rest for all. Beginning with speed the air was almost dead and the handtowers, try as they might, could not achieve the high launches that earlier were common. Neither O'Shea or Mattingly, both of U.K. were able to finish the course. Payne, also with a low launch, demonstrated how to run speed from a 50 meter launch. His 26 seconds was excellent for such a low launch. Schiborr of Germany gambled too greatly as he went for broke and destroyed his plane at the turn. 16 year old Andre Gouverneur of Belgium, the youngest competitor there, had radio failure which gave him also a zero. Pagliano of Italy, with his delicate dope and tissue covered stabs received a zero when the stab was broken in an aborted flight. Skip made immediate friends with the Italian as he monocoted the stab for him, increasing the strength by a tremendous amount in time for the next task.

Distance was next on the agenda and a few positions shifted. Tenholt, Netherlands, trying for second or third place knew he would need a substantial number of laps. He went searching for lift, found none and got one lap for his efforts. This dropped him to fourth. On the other hand, Frikkie Roos of S. Africa, who after the 5th round had been in 4th place, boosted himself to second with a fantastic 19 laps.

Duration was rather an anticlimax, though Decker had a beautiful flight one second off at the spot for 1000 points. By this time Skip was in somewhat of a daze and the masses of people constantly photographing him, examining his Aquila, had finally unraveled his concentration. But even after falling out during his last task, he was impossible for anyone to catch. As Skip wandered back to the impound area he was surrounded by photographers; the air buzzed with cameras.

As we waited impatiently for the inevitable results we were entertained by a show of the impeccable pattern skills of Austrian Hanno Prettnner, three time winner of the Tournament of Championships in Las Vegas, with his dazzling Curare. Later a restored fullsize Spitfire flew low over the field, wagging its wings. The power air show was meant to please the large crowd which had come to view the event.



Here's the very impressive hardware that the thirty-four soaring pilots from all over the world were vying for in the competition.

This was the first time I had ever been to an R/C glider competition that catered so well to spectators. The play by play description of what was going on in the air by Brian Dawson over the loudspeaker, kept a crowd of nearly 800 people excited and involved.

Finally the long awaited results were tabulated and ready to be released. No matter how certain I felt of Skip's position, I knew I couldn't relax until it was announced officially. Jack Abbott read aloud the team positions first; the U.S. team had won by a healthy 1090 points over second place team U.K. Australia having regarded themselves as underdogs

at the start of the contest, had placed a strong third. The U.S. team had accomplished what no one would have predicted. They had taken 1st overall in the strong consistency of Skip Miller as well as the team victory. Dale Nutter had placed a healthy 8th and Lemon Payne 11th. The persistence and concentration shown by our fliers, our team manager Dan Pruss and field crew Dave Thornberg had paid off.

We returned to the Burgerspark wishing we could finally relax. Unfortunately that would be impossible; the awards banquet was to begin at 8 o'clock and we were leaving for the Kruger game park at 9 the next morning. We had to pack now or at 4 in the morning.

The awards banquet was as elegant as anything I've ever seen; the flags of all the countries adorned the walls, flowers everywhere and over a hundred beautifully dressed people bearing the healthy glow of a week in the S. African sunshine. The wine flowed, the speeches and toasts went on and on and finally came the time to present the awards. The third and second place winners, Sean Bannister, U.K. and Frikkie Roos, S. Africa respectively, received bronze and silver medals and Dan Pruss received the tram trophy for the U.S. team, which consisted of a verdite base with brass plaque and silver wire sculpture. Then Skip went up to receive his gold medal and trophy and give his speech of thanks. All I could think of was how we'd ever get that trophy home, with its marble base, bronze figure and silver cup it weighed close to 50 pounds. Don MacKenzie, chairman of the SAARF (S. African Association of Radio Fliers) assured me there was a crate that went with it. Later we retired to the hotel lobby to drink champagne with the countless friends we had all made.

By morning a sleepy twenty-five of us had boarded our bus to Kruger. An all day trip afforded us a beautiful view of the Eastern Transvaal. In two days time at Kruger, we saw white rhinos, elephants, hippos, giraffes, hundreds of Impala, a hyena, many large soaring birds, baboons, zebra, wildebeest, wild boars, almost everything but the cats, the grass being too high from all the rain. Peter Joffe, our guide, also a R/C soaring enthusiast as well as editor of a small R/C soaring magazine, was invaluable as he told us about the various animals we saw.

Returning to Johannesburg, we stayed at the Victoria Hotel and spent a few days shopping and sightseeing. Finally it was time to go home. Peter Joffe and Jack Abbott drove us all to the airport; while Monte Malherbe and about twenty other S. Africans with whom we had made friends, brought the plane crates from Pretoria. We shared one last drink and were on our way. We spread out on the half-empty plane and slept much of the 17 hours home.

We reached New York and in the confusion of customs and making connections parted ways. Our long journey was over. The months of balsa and MonoKote spread all over the house had been justified. We were coming home to Boulder, Colorado, not only with three whole planes, but the trophy of the First World Championships of R/C Soaring as well.

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	MRC 772	FUTABA® MODEL FP-2GA	COX/SANWA® MODEL 8020
Open Gimbal Sticks For Precise Control	Yes	No	No
D'Arsonval Meter, Monitors Transmitter Battery	Yes	Yes	No
ITT Cannon "Centi-Loc"™ Spring Action, Positive Contact Gold Plated Connectors	Yes	No	No
Double Tuned Front End Receiver	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lead Out Wires From The Receiver For Easier Installation	Yes	No	No
Largest Transmitter	Yes	No	No
Integrated Circuit Decoder Utilized In Receiver	Yes	Yes	No
Lowest Current Drain Receiver (No servos Connected)	Yes	No	No
External Servo Potentiometer Adjustment For Centering	Yes	No	Only Output Arm Is Adjustable
Length Of Warranty	1 Year	180 Days	6 Months

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† Comparison of features based on R/C systems purchased November 1976.

