

Fifth World POPS meet

18-25 Sep 1999

Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada

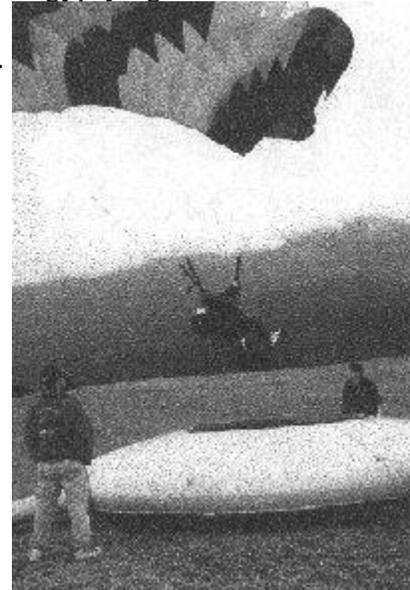
The fifth POPS world meet called Chilliwack, British Columbia, home for its ten-day span. The Fraser Valley Skydiving Centre lies an hour inland from Canada's Pacific coast and ten miles north as the crow flies from the U.S.-Canadian border at Washington State. It's only 32 feet above sea level in a valley surrounded on three sides by glacial volcanic mountains stretching to 9,000 feet. Just over the crests to the south towers the snowy peak of Mt. Baker, Washington, visible only minutes after the plane lifts off. To the west, beyond the sprawling Vancouver metroplex, clear skies sometimes reveal the Grouse Island chain that extends northward along the Pacific Coast from the San Juan Islands of Washington.

Chilliwack has supported a skydiving center for more than 30 years, gypsying from one farmer's field to another under the management of one club or another. It has even hosted two Canadian national skydiving championships. Ordinarily though, Fraser Valley supports a couple of Cessnas and prides itself on being the friendliest and slowest-paced of the three DZs serving Vancouver. Jumpers there seem never short of stories.

So, it's no wonder the whole town got behind an event that drew a total of almost 300 jumpers, including 175 POPS competitors, from September 17-26. Kapowsin Air Sports supplied its Super Twin Otter; another came to help from Skydive Arizona for the event's busy first weekend.

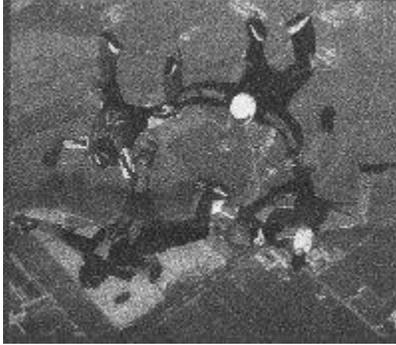
Things started slowly Saturday morning, despite being in the middle of the longest run of beautiful skydiving weather British Columbia had seen since the summer of 1998: clear, highs in the low 80s, calm. Chilliwack supplied a school bus to haul jumpers the four miles from the DZ to the municipal airport which had jet fuel and a longer, paved runway. Just as the two planes settled

into a good pace, flying without shutdowns, one of them lost a starter-generator, leaving the other one going as fast as it could on Saturday afternoon. Finally, a load of hopeful sunset jumpers departed the municipal airport, only to return disappointed to the DZ by bus. Too dark.



Good Times

POPS meets are apparently just an excuse for a really huge party. One wouldn't ordinarily



consider an evening hanging out with 40- to 80-somethings very interesting. Remember, though, that these are seasoned skydivers who for many years have drunk beer, etc., and told stories around a bonfire long into the night. Saturday night's party migrated from the fire to the campground and back several times, until only the hard-core revelers remained at 4:00. Finally, other campers ordered them to bed. (Who would camp at a boogie and complain about the partying?) This set the party pace for the rest of the meet.

Both planes flew the following morning with more POPS members who arrived during the night and more young fun jumpers from all around Western Canada. Some even traveled from Ontario, far to the east. Two Super Twin Otters is a rare event in Canada.

Jumps ranged from serious formation flying to freeflying to jumpers merely sit-flying as they admired Fraser Valley's beautiful scenery. After trying all weekend, international POPS members set a new Canadian over-40 record with a 20-way. That evening, another optimistic sunset load returned by bus from the airport, with still another on deck.

Just Us POPS

Perfect conditions prevailed into Monday and Tuesday. POPS members continued with the boogie and scheduled practice days as most of the PUPS (parachutists under phorty) returned to work. Only the Twin Otter from Kapowsin remained, and POPS jumpers kept it busy all day both days starting around mid-morning. The Skydivers Over Sixty. A subgroup of POPS, built a 13-way and claimed another Canadian record-but it wasn't good enough to top the current overall record SOS 20-way. Another POPS splinter group, the Jumpers Over Seventy, set a record of their own with a 4-way. Everyone knows what comes next, of course, and it's only a matter of time and better health care.

Monday evening, the DZ crew moved the inflatable accuracy tuffet to Major League, a local establishment, where the Cessnas dispatched nine loads of accuracy jumpers for dinner and drinks on the deck. That party eventually retired to the nighdy camp fire around 10 p.m., but not before signing the cute, young waitress up for a tandem. Some things don't change with age. The DZ shut down early Tuesday afternoon for the opening ceremonies. Competitors and their entourages divided into 13 attending countries for a one-mile parade down Spadina Avenue through Chilliwack to Salish Park, where a salmon barbecue waited. Meet director Barry McAuley introduced Chilliwack Mayor John Les, who welcomed all and spoke about the wonder of hosting such a large event. McAuley kept it brief, and a huge feed ensued.

How it Started

The Chilliwack meet marks the fifth POPS world championships. In 1990, Aussie Top POP Bernie Shaw, who attended this Chilliwack meet, kicked off this POPS tradition with a meet at the Ettamogah Pub in Albury, New South Wales, Australia. U.S. Top POP Bill Wood reciprocated three years later with a world meet at the late Jimmy Godwin's DZ in Umatilla, Florida. John Crowhurst, U.K. Top POP and the newly appointed World Top POP (he accepted

the post at this meet's awards banquet), hosted one in Empuriabrava, Spain, in 1995. Michael Allum, U.K. Top POP in 1997, took the group to Aoaba, Jordan, the most exotic venue yet. Allum was also named the first World Top POP, whose job it now is to prepare the next world POPS championship meet.

American Alicia Moorehead succeeded Allum as Top POP after Jordan in 1997. She chose Chilliwack just in time to see the currency bust in Southeast Asia. She had been considering a meet in Indonesia that might have turned out horribly as a result of the current political unrest there.

In Chilliwack, all her planning looked as if it would pay off with the most successful world meet ever. She had the best turnout yet, great airplanes and a cadre of volunteers who left no comfort unattended. The DZ had food on site, clean, hot showers, shade tents, reliable packers, a capable P.A. and judges galore, led by Rina Gallo.

The news of a front descending across Alaska defied credibility.



Competition Begins

Wednesday was almost hot, and some of the northern skydivers complained a little. Packers looked half dead as they toiled in the heat, wrestling with 300-square-foot nine-cells and 230-square-foot zero-Ps, not to mention the odd accuracy behemoths. And all for \$5 Canadian (about \$3.50 U.S.).

The first round of 4-way scrambles took off around 10 a.m., and the pace didn't let up until sunset. In this event, all self-qualified competitors throw their names into a hat and draw teams. Of course, half the groups have trouble building the first point, but the idea is for everyone to get to know each other. Nobody really cares who wins.

As day one of competition ended and the party took on a nice hum, a dim halo surrounded the nearly lull moon. An occasional cloud blacked out the brilliant Canadian night sky, otherwise peppered with constellations of every kind.

Switching Gears

Thursday morning's broken ceiling switched the focus to accuracy. Clouds crossing the valley at 4,000 to 6,000 feet opened and closed the skies, thwarting most of the fun loads and hiding the higher peaks to the southwest. Meanwhile, Chilliwack's Cessnas popped up and down all day. POPS accuracy presents ten times the spectacle of regular national or international competition. And bigger meets tend to bring a wide array of canopies.



This world meet had everything from the dead-serious Para-Foils and Challengers to Ed Hefrigitit's masterfully-swooped Icarus Extreme FX 120 (he weighs around 170).

But nothing compared to the crazy landings of the unpracticed jumpers under nine-cells, vintage seven-cells and the like, who approached the big air tuffet from every conceivable angle.

Some would careen off it like a waterslide, others would slam into it from the side, knocking it five or six feet sometimes sending a judge or two flying, as well. Still others would stall 15 feet above and freefall into it.

Some, who counted on the air cushion to save them, missed the tuffet altogether. Spectating within 100 feet of the tuffet often lead to active participation.

And remember, these aren't kids. How few actually required assistance to walk back to the packing area testifies less to their competition accuracy shortcomings than to their willingness to go for it at all costs and never admit the consequences. While all the competitors were over 40, most were way over 40.

Accuracy continued until the last glimmer of diffused sunlight reflected off the now-pouring rain that lasted well into the evening beffire tapering off Tough guys.

At the end of the day, the same jumper who had won in 1997 in Jordan held a commanding lead. Jeff Chandler of the U.K had scored a respectable total of .04 cm. after four jumps. Behind him was Canada's Rich Knot with .10. Joe Ablutt, also of Canada, followed immediately with .11 cm., and for the U.S., Tom Zukowski tied for fourth with Canadian Ken Sommerfield, both scoring .12 cm.

Quick Breakdown

Friday dawned a little drier, but conditions deteriorated, albeit reluctantly. After a few jumps in the morning and a long weather hold, the day ended with a barbecue of steak, baked potatoes and corn, followed by steadily increasing rain. That night, with everyone snug in their tents, a rare gale tore through sleepy Fraser Valley, knocking down trees and power lines in a path that extended all the way from the coast. As campers sciambled to hold on to their belongings in the 60-mph winds, others chased what they could. By morning, the twisted fframes of the shade tents were all that remained of the color and life that had once defined the perimeter of the main area. The winds howled all day Saturday. Not a prop turned. Everyone gathered at the sponsoring Best Western Hotel in town for Saturday night's banquet, disappointed not to have participated in the premier event, the hit 'n' rock. The famous POPS contest involves accuracy in a very non-traditional sense. The competitor lands at the target, strips his or her gear, stomps the disk and runs for an easy chair 40 feet away. Unbelievably, the fastest time belongs to Bobby Valenzuela of Arizona, something like 3.6 seconds.

At the banquet, World Top POP Moorhead announced her retirement and Crowhurst's succession. He gets to choose the destination of the next world POPS meet. The banquet included the many awards saved during the preceding months just to be presented at this event, both for POPS and for the big Canadian contingent. The meet's personality plate, an award for fostering good frelings during the meet, went to the Danish delegation for their songs and good cheer.

Although the meet was officially over, 58 hangers-on revived it for a few hours on Sunday to conduct what they could of hit 'n' rock under a 2,500-foot ceiling. Swiss Top POP Leo Fritchly won the event with 5.2 seconds. Remarkably, John Fleming made it to the chair in 20.48 seconds-he's completely blind. As he had done all week, Fraser Valley DZ manager Norm Forbes radioed him through the descent and, this time, through the run for the chair.

Heart of POPS

Not all POPS, SOS and JOS members are legends, with some having started jumping only a year or two before this POPS world meet. But many arc. Celebrities include accuracy champions from years gone, past and present leaders of the organizations that steer skydiving in their own

countries, inventors, DZ owners and simply life-long, hard-core skydivers. They meet here and elsewhere to play out a theme bordering on a religion in their lives – skydiving. They trade stories, autographs, photographs and memories for this week. The opportunity comes but once every two years at some remote location that's a little hard and expensive to get to but located near another part of the world most have always wanted to see.

They lack pretense and barriers. They share their talents and ideas freely and honor one another with an audience or merely an ear. They seem to care for and about each other, as would soldiers from wars past. Yet they also seem not to live in the past of skydiving, but rather in what they see themselves as now: skydivers at the turn of the century in a sport that only first became possible in their generation.

And lot those who never believed they would survive skydiving in this last century, it's the sport that, almost beyond their wildest dreams, will comfortably usher them into the next.

Full Results

Accuracy

1	Jeff Chandler	UK	0.04
2	Rich Knott	CANADA	0.10
3	Joe Ablitt	CANADA	0.11
4	Tom Zukowski	USA	0.12
5	Ken Sommerfeld	CANADA	0.12
6	Barry McAuley	CANADA	0.14
7	Dick Rapacilo	USA	0.14
8	Bob Amos	CANADA	0.15
9	Theo Fritschy	SWITZERLAND	0.17
10	Brian Gough	CANADA	0.18

Hit 'N Rock

1	Theo Fritschy	SWITZERLAND	5.20
2	Tom Zukowski	USA	6.02
3	Carol Smith	NEW ZEALAND	6.10
4	Brian Wnuk	CANADA	6.21
5	Dick Rapacilo	USA	6.29
6	Glenn Stephanson	SCOTLAND	6.54
7	Peter Schmid	SWITZERLAND	6.74
8	Pat Moorhead	USA	6.83

9 George Tsakris USA 6.94
10 Max Oberli SWITZERLAND 6.94

4-Way Scrambles

1 Team #14 Eike Hohenadl USA
Nick Stetzenko CANADA
Ron McFarland USA
Hanspeter Schmid SWITZERLAND

2 Team #18 Pat Moorhead USA
Gary Farnsworth CANADA
Ed Hefright USA
Pamela Rhodes USA

3 Team #2 Hedwig Mauchle SWITZERLAND
Janna Wynne USA
Charles MacCrone USA
Michael Tompkins USA

4 Team #1 Dick Rapacilo USA
Werner Kazmirek GERMANY
Tom Zukowski USA
Claude Arseneau CANADA

5 Team #6 Lew Sanborn USA
Jim Patterson CANADA
Harry Leicher USA
Gordon McElroy AUSTRALIA

Overall with a total of 10 points: Tom Zukowski - USA

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