



Photo: Kevin Barker

HUGE PRIZES FOR NEW AIR RACE

Electronics and competitor preparation will play major roles in the Race of Champions....

PRIZES CONSERVATIVELY valued at well over half-a-million rand will be up for grabs for the forthcoming *Race of Champions* air race which is to be hosted by the Letaba Flying Club, Tzaneen, as part of its 50th anniversary celebrations.

Not only will this arguably represent among the highest value prizes in recent South African sport aviation history, but the race itself, to be held from August 16 to 18, will introduce new technology which will assist in making it a spectator event as well.

Originally mooted as a once-off event to mark the club's Golden Jubilee, such has been the response that the organisers are now planning to have it as an annual race staged at different venues with the race being held two years running at each centre. Full details for this planning have yet to be announced.

Value of the prizes for the first, second and third-placed crews will alone be worth R300 000 and, in addition, other prizes worth a similar amount will be awarded during the three-day event for various reasons, such as lucky draws etc. This could increase as the date draws nearer.

Air BP is sponsoring all fuel for the race. This means that aircraft will be refuelled at the Letaba airfield shortly before the race, and will again be refuelled immediately afterwards without competitors having to dig into their pockets for the fuel for the race itself.

A large insurance company, Alexander Forbes, will be donating one of the bigger prizes, but has yet to announce its value. Other potential sponsors are also considering their participation.

Among the other prizes, many of which still have to be announced, is one

for the winning woman pilot which will be a silver rose bowl floating trophy donated by *World Airnews* in addition to each pilot and navigator receiving a complimentary year's subscription.

ELECTRONICS

Electronic "wizardry" is to be employed not only to assist with the actual organisation of the *Race of Champions*, but also to make the event more spectator-friendly. The equipment is being supplied by Pretoria-based Virtual Spectator, which claims to be the country's first live online virtual sports content provider.

Each of the expected 100 aircraft taking part in the race will be equipped with a "logger" which will transmit the aircraft's current position back to the Letaba airfield where it will be displayed over a map of the course shown on a large screen. With this system, not only will spectators at the airfield have an up-to-the-minute view of the race and the position of the competitors, but anyone in the world with access to the web will be able to do the same.

Spectators will have the option to SMS or log on to the Virtual Spectator web site (www.virtualspectator.co.za) to get relevant updates on any of the competing aircraft – in other words, anyone can watch the race from the comfort of his or her armchair at home, or on a huge screen at the airport itself.

In addition, brand new electronic clocks will be used to log each aircraft's time as it crosses the various checkpoints. This information will be relayed back to base immediately with the result that the final handicap placing of all aircraft will be available immediately the last aircraft crosses the line.

THE RACE

The biggest difference between the *Race of Champions* and the President's Trophy Air Race held at Klerksdorp in May, will be the handicapping of the competitors.

A spokesman for the organising committee told *World Airnews* that the handicapping would be based on historic performance data of the various types of aircraft and their powerplants.

"We believe that the team with the most preparation and practice should have the best chance to win the race," the spokesman said.

Entry fee for the race is R1 000 per aircraft and no compulsory membership fees will be required.

Three basic courses for the race have already been decided upon, but these will remain secret until the final briefing takes place the evening before the start. One of these will be a bad weather course in the event of cloudy conditions.

With the number of entries limited to a maximum of 100, the race will be open to all piston-engined aircraft, including home-builts and very light aircraft, provided these have a minimum cruising speed of 100 knots and a range of at least 400 nautical miles. The race on both days will be flown over a distance of around 300 to 330 nautical miles.

The Letaba Flying Club is also organising a full social calendar for the three-day period with a variety of entertainment for both the competitors and their supporters. In addition, the club has also organised with the local municipality to have one of the main taxiways at the airfield tarred for the occasion.

A full television programme will be made of the race which will also be available on DVD. →