

➤ How to practise effectively

Even when your equipment is in order and you know what you'll be trying to achieve, you still need to practise effectively. Every flight you make should be like a competitive flight. Set a task, make a start, fly the task if at all possible and make a finish.

Simply flying cross-country by following good patches of weather around is not good practice for competition.

If possible, use the glider and equipment you intend to use for the competition.

Physical fitness

Physical fitness is another key element of preparation. Gliding competitions are very demanding, both mentally and physically. Many hours of task flying over several days require high levels of stamina. It is impossible to remain mentally alert for long periods without first attaining a reasonable level of physical fitness. Anything you can do to improve your physical fitness will improve your performance and enjoyment. (See below for *psychological preparation*.)

Logistics

You also need to sort out logistics well in advance. Once you have identified your crew and made sure they know the dates they are needed, agree defined roles and responsibilities for yourself and for them. Will you trust the crew to rig the glider? Connect the controls? Fill up with water-ballast? Clear logger memories? Load the tasks into the GPS? Clearly there are no hard and fast rules, but what is important is that you define what you expect the crew to do and what you will do.

I personally always take responsibility for items that have critical safety implications or flight recording function. I always rig the wings, tailplane, connect the controls and DI the glider, clear logger memories, install the loggers and load tasks into the GPS.

Try to get everything (glider, caravan, tent, crew) to the competition site early so that you can check in with the organisation in good time. Settle yourself in and establish a daily routine that allows you to relax.

Expectations and objectives

Only after honestly appraising your level of progress can you establish some realistic expectations for the competition.

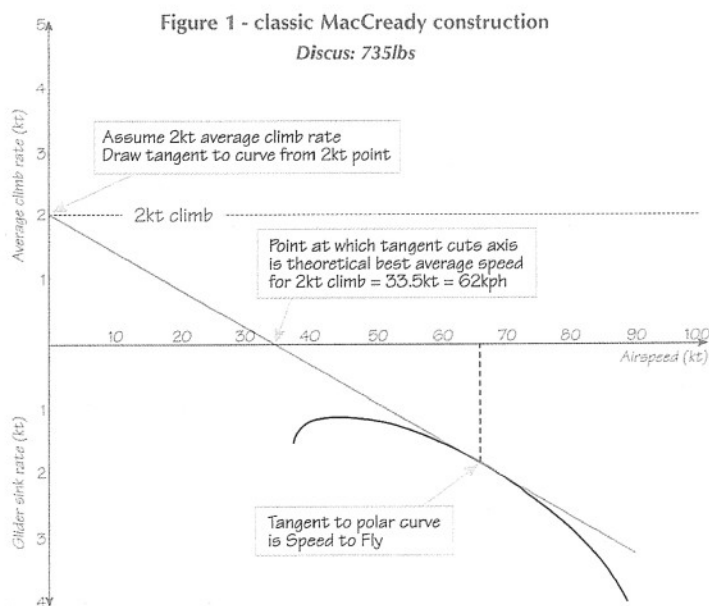
Assess your own abilities: try to consider objectively what level your flying has reached. How experienced are you? How have your skills developed? What have you achieved so far: Silver, Gold, 300km, 500km? Do you have any other competition experience, task weeks or Inter-club League? How did you perform relative to the other pilots? Are you able to compare your flying with that of other experienced competition pilots? How well has your practice for the competition been going?

Realistic expectations: you should try to establish some realistic expectations and

Figure 1, right, illustrates the polar curve for an unballasted Discus with the construction for 2kt average climb rate.

By repeating this construction for various climb rates using your own glider's polar curve, it is possible for you to draw up a table of average climb rate versus theoretical average cross-country speed, as in Table 1 (opposite)

(Steve Longland)



objectives prior to entering the competition. For example, if you have previously flown a 300km flight, a realistic expectation is to successfully fly a 300km task with the objective of going faster than you have previously achieved, or perhaps completing a 500km task if the weather is good.

It is important to note that the emphasis is on flying objectives and not on the result. One of the ways to very effectively inhibit your performance is to set unrealistic objectives that focus on the result.

For example, if your objective is to place in the top five, failure to achieve that result destroys your enjoyment of the competition and the resulting stress will further affect your performance.

The psychology of competing

Flying a glider cross-country requires complex mental processing of vast amounts of information.

We **see**, **hear**, and **feel** information, which we need to be able to **observe**, **process**, and **compare** with our database (our mental library of our experience), **decide** what to do, **instruct** our hands and feet on the controls and **review** our decision to see if it was correct, while at the same time continuing to observe and process new information as it comes in.

The pilot is best able to carry out these complex mental processes when relaxed. As stress levels rise, the individual's capacity to carry out these complex processes is greatly reduced. Decisions start to become irrational rather than instinctive.

The perfect state of mind is relaxed and alert with decisions being made almost instinctively.

All sorts of mental **baggage** can raise your stress levels, and – by cutting across your ability to process information – this can significantly lower your performance levels.

There isn't a lot we can do about some of the baggage we carry around such as our jobs, relationships, financial worries, and

so on, although we can help by not starting any new projects just before the competition begins. There is, however, a huge amount we can do about gliding and competition-related baggage.

Start by preparing properly for the contest so that you are content with your equipment and training. Establish realistic expectations and objectives for the competition.

Many pilots find a regular daily routine at the competition helps them to relax.

Use other competitors for information, but don't allow yourself to worry about what they are doing or have done. If somebody has caught you up having started later, it's just history, there's nothing you can do to change that history.

Most definitely don't try to do something different to get away from them, it's a certain recipe for disaster.

Don't waste time and energy complaining that the task is too difficult/easy/set in the wrong direction (delete as appropriate). It's the same task for everybody.

It's noticeable that those pilots who spend most time complaining often do the worst in competitions; they are just stressing themselves into performing badly.

If you get low, lose time or suffer any other disappointment, you can force yourself to relax by concentrating on soaring aspects of the flight, for example, where you will find the next good climb, which street to follow and so forth.

Focusing on the result is bad for your mental health. Emphasise flying objectives and ambitions. Try to relax and to fly instinctively whilst avoiding irrational decisions. Above all else **aim to have fun**.

A little theory

This section will give guidance on how fast to fly and explains how you might consistently go a little faster by flying a little slower. By giving an appreciation of achievable average speeds, it will also help to guide you on what your task start time should be.