



How to enjoy your first

British Team Coach Andy Davis, above, winner of two Standard Class Gold Medals at World Championships, draws on the successful team training programme and on his own experience for tips to help you

WHEN well prepared and in the right frame of mind I find competition flying really enjoyable. I can hardly wait for the daily briefing to find out what the next challenge will be. It is fantastic fun to race along with your peers on a good day and incredibly satisfying to complete a difficult task on a day when you might normally not even open the trailer doors. It is even more fun if you are performing well.

Yet it can be incredibly frustrating and demoralising if you perform badly, especially if the reasons are within your control.

In this article I intend to focus on the five main areas that experience has shown can and do affect competition performance and therefore the satisfaction you gain from flying in competitions.

These are:

Preparation – of your equipment, making sure you understand the task objectives, how to practise effectively, fitness and logistics;

Expectations and objectives – the psychology stuff, assessing what level you have reached, setting realistic goals and objectives;

Theory (just a little) – what you can easily do to consistently go faster and why;

Practice – how to effectively train for contest flying;

Execution – what to do at the competition, the main dos and don'ts.

Although this guide is intended to help those pilots new to competitive flying with both preparation for and participation in their first competition, experienced racing pilots might also find it useful revision.

Much of the content is drawn from the British Team Coaching Programme.

Preparation

To start with, it goes without saying that your equipment should be in the best possible working order. The time to sort this out is well in advance of the competition.

Wheel brake: sooner or later in a competition you are going to have to make an outlanding and the wheel brake on your glider *must* be well adjusted and effective. Nothing is going to distract you from the primary task of soaring more than worrying about its effectiveness, and how you are going to stop the glider if you land in one of those small fields below!

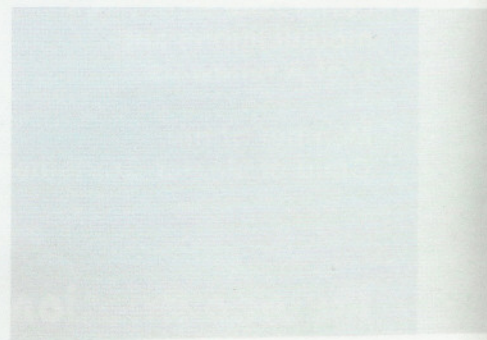
Drinking water: your cockpit should be comfortable and have provision for carrying a reasonable quantity of drinking water. Dehydration really affects performance, especially in a long competition, and is potentially a killer. If you regularly get headaches after flying you almost certainly don't drink enough.

How much should you drink? As a guide, in hot weather I often drink two litres of water before flying, three litres of water on a five-hour flight and then another litre after landing.

Relief system (pee tube for us boys!): if you are drinking enough water you will eventually need to urinate. Your glider should have an easy-to-use relief system (I personally don't find plastic bags easy to use – nor does Jay Rebbeck... but that's another story). I know that it's not quite so easy for you girls, but there are answers: ask other female pilots. (Geraldyn Macfadyen has a system that works well.) *Restricting fluid intake is not an option.*

Wing leading edge: most performance loss comes from damage and chips to the leading edge: fill any chips or dents with filler or gel coat and rub smooth. Then keep the wing clean throughout the competition. Consider fitting bug wipers. Used regularly in buggy weather they really do prevent a large amount of performance loss.

Instruments: having the latest gadget in the cockpit is much less important than ensuring that what you have is reliable and that you know how it works. Too many gadgets increase your workload and keep your attention inside the cockpit when you should be looking outside. The most capable computer in the cockpit is the pilot's brain and the best source of information is the pilot's eyes. A good total energy audio variometer is crucially important so that you can keep your eyes outside when joining and climbing in thermals. Your GPS



Top: Andy in Discus 2a 80, in which he won the 2003 World