



2013 CIVL PLENARY – ANNEX 19D

NEW COMPETITION CLASS – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ‘serial vs. open class’ debate has been raging for well over a decade within the paragliding world.

We need to retrace our steps back to the 1999 CIVL Plenary in Copenhagen to find the early discussions at international level on ‘serial’ vs. ‘open’ class paragliders in competitions. In those days ‘serial’ class was DHV 2-3 or AFNOR Performance.

The debate was instigated by Robbie Whittall, a past world paragliding and hang gliding champion, world record holder and test pilot. The proposal did not succeed, largely because the PWC had already decided to trial the introduction of serial class that year. Delegates chose to wait and see. The PWC experiment was inconclusive. It was not popular with many pilots and consequently only lasted a year.

However, dating from around that period, several nations, including Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan and Spain, have at various times been successfully running serial class only or simultaneous serial/open class events.

At the 2000 CIVL Plenary, a proposal to run FAI Category 1 championships as serial class only events was defeated. The subject has been raised at the CIVL Plenary virtually every year since, usually by the Nordic countries and Germany. In recent years, the EHPU (European Hang Gliding and Paragliding Union) has also recommended a move to serial class. Each year, the serial class proposals have failed.

Safety and fairness were the primary reasons put forward by the supporters of ‘serial class only’. Open class supporters argued that there are no statistics to prove that open class gliders were any less safe than serial class; that without an open class, manufacturers would push serial class design to the limits; and paraglider design and development would be restricted. In addition, they argued, it would be extremely difficult for competition organisers to determine whether a serial class had been modified, taking it out of certification, and creating an unfair advantage.

By the end of 2009, paraglider design was evolving radically and rapidly at the high performance end of the market. This development has allowed a reduction of the number of lines, eventually to just two spans – the 2-liner. Drag has been reduced and top speeds have increased dramatically.

The number of incidents at the 2009 Worlds in Mexico (including one fatality) ensured that safety remained high on the CIVL agenda. At the 2010 Plenary, a move to serial class was still the preferred option for some. But the PG Subcommittee, which built on the Swiss proposal to set up a working group to establish homologation criteria for a competition class paraglider, won the day. Thus the Open Class Technical Working Group was born. The first interim stage required manufacturers to meet certain construction limitations and minimum test requirements for ‘open class’ gliders. Eventually, a new EN standard and certification system for ‘competition class’ gliders was to be developed.

The systems to implement these rules were in place just in time for the World Paragliding Championships in Piedrahita. Following the double fatality on Task 2 at Piedrahita, compounded by the high number of additional incidents, the CIVL Bureau made its decision to stop the competition by temporarily suspending the certification of ‘competition class’ gliders in FAI Category 1 events.

As the 2012 CIVL Plenary came close, there was no need for a specific proposal to move to Serial class, as that was the de facto position. However, the consequences seemed to have

made all parties realise that some sort of 'competition' class paraglider was necessary to avoid EN-D becoming the 'competition' class. Many believed that the EN-D class would not fully recover, and pilots should be made better aware of the performance characteristics of the gliders they choose to fly.

Moreover, one of the overriding themes from the detailed report of the CIVL Competition Safety Task Force, was that some sort of 'competition' class should be reinstated as soon as possible. The Task Force gave considerable attention to the possibility of splitting the EN-D class to differentiate these new gliders. The same discussion has been taken up by the **Paraglider Manufacturers Association (PMA)**, and there appears to be no easy way to classify the wings.

By the time of the 2012 Plenary, the PMA had issued a statement that it intended to work towards creating a new 'competition' class paraglider, and developing an SIV-like training programme for competition pilots. The CIVL Paragliding Subcommittee, encouraged by the PMA's intentions, recommended that CIVL review this work once it is completed.

The Plenary agreed that for now Category 1 events would be run with EN certified gliders only and supported unanimously the Paragliding Subcommittee proposal to work on a new competition class.

Today, all parties agree that running Category 1 competitions with EN gliders only has not solved anything safety-wise or fairness-wise. More, it has created new problems, the corruption of the EN scheme being not the least. How should these problems be solved?