

World Gliding Grand Prix Championships

19th December to 24th December 2007

OMARAMA - NEW ZEALAND

1 ORGANISATION

1.1 Competition officials

Contest Director: Brian Spreckley

Scorer: Roland Stuck

Task Setter: Gavin Wills / Gee Dale

Meteorology: Lemmy Tanner

Media/promotion: Peter Newport & Airsports Live

Safety: Bob Henderson

CAA Liaison: Max Stephens

Overall organisation was professional, efficient, effective and friendly.

1.2 Experience of officials

All officials were experienced with international Championships, either as organisers, competitors or stewards/jury. One of the most experienced and professional groups that I have seen running a championships. This experience was reflected in the efficient operation of the event.

1.3 Pilot selection and experience

The GP selection process ensured that all competitors were experienced and capable. There were 18 competitors but with a limited spread of countries represented (11 countries - 5 German pilots, 2 British, 2 French, 2 South African pilots, and 1 pilot each from Australia, Czech Republic, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Russia and USA).

Most of the pilots were ranked in the top 100 on the international ranking list, with 5 of them in the top 20. World #1 Sebastian Kawa was competing and won the title of champion on the last day.

1.4 Total number of scheduled days and number of contest days

We had 5 competition days out of 6 possible. The only day lost was a declared rest day following the fatal accident (see later). The competition period seemed very short for a major international event and I would recommend that the rules should require a minimum duration for the competition (suggest 8 competition days).

The organisers did have the option of flying two more days at the Wanaka Air Games although it was not clear as to who or how this decision would be made.

1.5 Social interaction

The small number of entries and the focus on 1:1 racing meant that the social interaction was a major strength of this event. Pilots interacted closely and with good humour, and without the 'national team' impacts that we see at normal world championships, the social relationships were excellent.

Briefing was relaxed, pilots also met at the local restaurant before launch, after flying many watched some of the tracking replays, and many had dinner together in the restaurant or Hotel. It was certainly the most social interaction that I have seen at an international event.

2 Operations

2.1 Weather and task setting

This service was provided by the professional staff from Omarama.com with Lemmy Tanner providing the weather briefing and Gavin Wills and G Dale setting tasks. Their local experience meant that they could select the appropriate task direction to suit the tricky weather conditions, and still provide challenges for the pilots on each day. Competition Director Brian Spreckley also contributed to the success of the tasks through questioning and pushing the task setters. Each day G Dale would launch early and provide actual condition reports in the different task directions and this contributed significantly to the success. On one day the pilots flew Task F after multiple changes to select the only possible task direction and length.

Task distances ranged from 150km through to 280km - short tasks are better suited to media interest – and winning speeds from 115kph through to 135kph, so even the weak days were fast

2.2 Scoring

The scoring office was located in an air conditioned office within the briefing/admin area. Computers were provided for flight recorder downloads, although the majority of pilots handed in memory sticks and SD cards. Scoring was performed by Roland Stuck with support from Trevor Atkins and Aileen Henderson.

The scoring system used was See You and this required significant manual interpretation for GP, with manual validation of height, speed and time at the start.

On the first day the process seemed fairly complex and time consuming, but by the second day a good system was ensuring rapid calculation of scores – which suited the media demands for results.

There was one complaint raised concerning the calculation of speed at the start. The pilot concerned queried the manner that See You used to calculate the speed at the start. Numerous emails were exchanged with the people at See You and the final conclusion was that the method used by See You was incorrect and the method was changed for the remainder of competition days. Penalties were revised and corrected where necessary.

Scores

With the place scoring system, there is a fine line between victory and defeat. The scoring system meant that the first 9 pilots received points and the remainder scored zero for the day. On all but one day, if you were 5 minutes slower than the winner then you scored zero points – a tough result. With our normal 1000 point scoring, 5 minutes equates to approximately 50 points. When flying against the best pilots in the world it was fairly difficult for these pilots to find that they were still scoring zero after a number of days of good flying, but just a fraction slow.

There were suggestions that points should be awarded for all competitors on each day, but by the end of the competition this view reverted to accepting the current system.

2.3 Launching

Launching was efficient. 6 tugs launched the 18 gliders in approximately 20 minutes. This was important to ensure that all gliders were given equal opportunity to get to the start zone at a good height and well prepared for the start.

The contest director utilised the tracking system to ensure that all gliders were established for the start before declaring the start opening time.

2.4 Start procedures

The race horse start process was quite spectacular to watch from the ground and also on the tracking system. It was apparent that many of the pilots in the first few days were not timing the start accurately, but after a few days the starts were close and accurate

2.5 Weighing

Gliders were weighed each day quite efficiently. Gliders that were overweight only had to jettison excess water – no penalties were issued. This approach meant that there were no weight issues and pilots were quite relaxed about the process.

3 Media promotion

The major focus of the world gliding grand prix was to demonstrate our sport for media promotion. The energy, expertise and money that was used to achieve this aim was impressive. Much of the systems used for “Gladiators of the sky” was in evidence – on-board cameras and microphones, helicopter chase aircraft giving real time footage of the race, GPS tracking with display using ‘animation research’ simulation technology. The introduction of continuous on-line commentary with expert commentators including Gavin Wills, Anne-Kathrin Kien, and current women’s world champion Gill Spreckley. The major dissemination was via web page with the creation of documentaries for television. They ended up with international viewers emailing questions live which the commentators were able to answer on the spot.

Daily, we would watch the start live overhead the airfield and then race inside to watch again on the slightly delayed tracking. People would not leave the viewing area, instead being enthralled by the tactics being displayed as the pilots battled for position.

The work being done by Peter Newport and Air Sports Live must be commended, it is certainly an exciting product and we can only hope that it is finally accepted by the media promoters.

The follow-on event to the Grand Prix was the Wanaka Air Games, and this also was a huge success. It certainly showed that Gliding is well represented by the GP style of racing, and a similar approach was used by Hang Gliding and Paragliding.

Other airports still have some major changes to introduce if their sports are to suit media promotion in future World Air Games.

4 RULES

4.1 Adequacy of Local Procedures

The local procedures were adequate and covered all eventualities.

4.2 Fair applications of Rules and Local Procedures

All rules were applied fairly.

4.3 Protest handling and registration

No protests were filed. Only one formal complaint was raised which is discussed in the scoring section above.

5 SAFETY

5.1 Fatal accident

On day three, German Pilot Herbert Weiss was killed in a collision with one of the Mountain ridges. There is a formal investigation taking place by the CAA in NZ so the full facts are not yet known. Herbert was a very experienced glider pilot, over 8000 hours with a lot of experience in the mountains. He was also a very nice man. Conditions on the day were quite turbulent near to the mountain ridges and the task went into the edge of the dividing range at Siberia.

Because the tracking system was watching each glider, Hebert was seen down low on the ridges just before the turn along with a few others. Suddenly Herbert's tracker dropped out. This is actually reasonable common – on many days different trackers would drop out for a short time and then suddenly come back on line again. But the organisers were a little concerned because other data information also dropped out at the same time – quite unusual. This created immediate concern and a couple of Duo Discus that were flying in the area were asked to look in the area but they could not find any sign of the missing glider.

The tracker gave an accurate GPS position and so the organisers then sent a tow plane for a closer search of the position. They found the crash site and alerted rescue officials, one of the search helicopters landed close to the site. Unfortunately Herbert was killed on impact. The message though is that the tracking system enabled a quick and accurate response, if the pilot was injured it would have enabled rapid rescue, with a much happier outcome.

This was devastating for all pilots. As mentioned, the interaction and relationship between pilots was strong and in particular this was felt very strongly by the other German pilots and crew. The organisers handled the whole process very well, from the initial search and then with communicating effectively with pilots and crew at the event and with Herbert's family and friends back in Germany. There was a pilots meeting the next morning to consider the options for moving forward. All agreed that they were too upset/tired/involved to fly on that day and so a rest day was called. At the end of the contest the television producers put together a beautiful tribute to Herbert using some of the footage taken over the previous few days plus some impressive shots of the local mountains. This was even shown at the Air Games public display as the German team did a commemorative fly past.

5.2 Terrain and outlanding options

The area of the contest is fairly remote with limited road access in some parts. Landing options are good in some valleys but other areas have fairly limited options, usually small airfields. The organisers provided details of the landing options with GPS coordinates, and at each task briefing the task setter explained the landing options within the area.

There were a small number of outlandings and all were safe with no damage sustained.

5.3 Finish procedures

It was emphasised to all pilots that finishes should follow a descending flight path. In the early couple of days a few pilots were given warnings for not complying with this requirement and this quickly resulted in all pilots following the required procedure for the remainder of the competition.

5.4 Exceeding VNE

Concerns were raised before the event about reports from qualifying GP that pilots were exceeding the VNE of their aircraft, in particular with approaching turnpoints where a bonus point is awarded. During the event at Omarama no bonus point turnpoints were allocated and there was no issues raised about VNE. We may want to consider if we retain the bonus point system, if we do then we should consider clearly how to avoid VNE issues.

Final Results

Place	Points	CN	Pilot	Country	Glider	day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5
1	30	BB	Sebastien KAWA	Poland	Diana 2	0	10	6	6	8
2	25	VV	Uli SCHWENK	Germany	Ventus 2ax	10	5	0	8	2
3	25	Z2	Ben FLEWETT	New Zealand	ASW 27	6	8	4	7	0
4	24	DW	Steve JONES	UK	Ventus 2ax	8	7	5	4	0
5	17	MS	Michael SOMMER	Germany	ASG 29	1	0	8	5	3
6	17	AX	Petr KREJCIRIK	Czech Rep.	Ventus 2ax	7	6	0	3	1
7	15	DE	Mario KIESSLING	Germany	Ventus 2ax	5	0	10	0	0
8	14	47	Bruce TAYLOR	Australia	ASW 27	4	0	0	10	0
9	14	Y	Giorgio GALETTO	Italy	Ventus 2ax	0	1	7	0	6
10	13	K5	Peter HARVEY	UK	ASW 27	0	0	1	2	10
11	10	KW	Mark HOLLIDAY	South Africa	ASW 27	3	3	0	0	4
12	9	EQ	Christophe RUCH	France	Ventus 2a	0	2	2	0	5
13	7	EX	Erwin SOMMER	Germany	Ventus 2ax	0	0	0	0	7
14	4	29	Herbert WEISS	Germany	ASG 29	0	4	0	0	0
15	3	7D	Didier HAUSS	France	Ventus 2 cxT	0	0	3	0	0
16	3	NB	Oscar GOUDRIAAN	South Africa	Ventus	2	0	0	1	0
17	0	IE	Vladimir PANAFUTIN	Russia	LS6c	0	0	0	0	0
17	0	TM	Tim MCALLISTER	USA	Ventus C	0	0	0	0	0

Terry Cubley
REFEREE
10TH February 2008