

GLIDER RACING:
A NEW CONCEPT FOR THE GLIDING COMPETITION
AT THE WORLD AIR GAMES

Background

Despite the efforts of the IGC and the Organizers of International Championships, Gliding Competitions have never raised a great deal of interest in the public and in the media. This is probably due to the fact that gliding competitions are not spectacular compared to other sports and are also not easy for the media or the public to understand.

In our efforts to organize absolutely fair competitions, to iron out any influence of luck, and to take into account the often conflicting wishes of Organizers, we have produced with more and more complicated rules with many options concerning start modes, tasks, finish modes and scoring. A large majority of competitors are happy with these rules because they feel that they give fair results, but it is perhaps time to think differently and to invent simpler rules making our sport more spectacular, more interesting for the public and telespectators, and enjoyable for the participants. This has been done successfully in other sports and we feel that it is probably the only way to make our sport more popular.

We have a great opportunity to introduce and test a different style of competition at the World Air Games because this event has a different format from the usual World Gliding Championships.

We therefore suggest that the WAG be organized as a short duration contest, between nations represented by a limited number of high level and media-attractive pilots. The rules should be as simple as possible and it should immediately be evident for the public after the finish line has been crossed who is the winner or the leader of the competition. Furthermore, the race should be as spectacular as can be (keeping safety in mind!) and the public should be able to watch as much of it as possible.

Finally, the event must be set up so that it can be run easily in a country that does not have its own gliding fraternity.

The primary aim of this type of event must be to make gliding accessible to the general public as a spectator sport.

Hence our Proposal:

1. Status

The WAG will be removed from the standard World Gliding Championships. We feel it is important to find a name for this type of event to show that it is really a new concept of gliding competition. We propose to call it International Glider Racing or World Glider Grand Prix. Any better suggestion is welcome ...

2. Categories of Pilots

The WAG will be run in 3 Categories of pilots: (Adult) Men, Women and Mixed Juniors. We believe that three categories are necessary to ensure the economic viability of the event (Cf. WAG in Spain) especially considering that the number of pilots in each category will be limited (see below).

As to the choice of these categories, we think it is important to show women competing because the female population is probably the best potential reservoir for an increase in membership. It

is equally important to show younger pilots to demonstrate that our sport is accessible to youngsters.

3. Number of Entries

In each category the entries will be limited to one pilot per country plus the current world champions in all existing classes. This will result in about 30 pilots in Men and Junior categories and somewhat less in the Women category. The total number of pilots should thus ensure the economical viability of the event.

4. Choice of Gliders

The pilots should compete in a single glider design type in each class to equalize their chances. The type should be selected from among the most popular and easy to fly gliders. However such a choice may be difficult and may result in the creation of a monopoly.

We therefore would prefer to organize this contest with each category of pilots competing in one class since within the actual classes the gliders have very close performance and also look very similar as far as the public are concerned.

We suggest the Men compete in the 18M (with the Mop made unserviceable) or 15M Class, the Women in the 15 m class or Standard Class, and the Juniors in the Club or PW5 Class. (The choice of the Club Class with a handicap factor limited to 100 would allow the use of the numerous "old standard gliders" which are now very affordable even for younger people. Alternatively the choice of the PW5 would promote this glider.)

The gliders should have different color markings on the wings to distinguish the category to which they belong and they should also carry their national flags and emblems.

5. Start

Regardless of the scoring system used, it should be crystal clear to the public, immediately after a pilot crosses the finish line, who the (new) leader is. This must entail either a race ("regatta") start with place scoring, or a dedicated start according to previous results. We however feel that a dedicated start with imposed start times is difficult to organise and may become very unfair at the end of the competition since the delay between the starts may become so large that all pilots will no longer start with the same weather conditions.

We therefore recommend that the regatta start - all gliders in a group starting at the same time - tested successfully at the Grand Prix in Gawler 2001, be used for this event. For obvious safety reasons, the number of pilots starting simultaneously should be limited to a number around 10. Since the maximum number of pilots will be around 30, the pilots will have to be separated into two or three groups.

An altitude limit should be imposed and the gliders should be preferably launched all together at approximately the same distance from the start line.

6. Competition Management

To cope with the need to have several groups we propose that the competition be split into qualifications and finals. Assuming that the competition will last for approximately 10 days each part would last for 5 days.

Assuming three groups, the top third of the pilots, by ranking after the qualifications, will be qualified for the finals. The remaining pilots will form new groups, according to their ranking, to compete for the subsequent final places.

7 Scoring

Scoring should be as simple as possible. We propose to use to a simple placing system similar to the one used in Formula 1 car racing. This is a system that the public and the media already understand. A (small) differential should be provided for the three first placed pilots, but it is also important that even the slowest pilots get points in order not to discourage them.

8. Displays for the Public

Everything should be done to make the competition easy to follow for the public:

- The pilots nationality should be clearly displayed on the gliders because the public is more interested in competitions between countries than between individuals.
- The start line should be close enough to the airfield, with the maximum start altitude low enough to allow the public to see the starts.
- During the time the gliders are on task, images should be taken from cameras installed in the glider like in Formula 1 and displayed on a large screen. Images could also be taken from a motorglider or a helicopter following the competitors.
- Tracking using the GNSS position should also be used with digitally enhanced graphics to show the gliders in flight.
- It is also suggested that a turn point over the airfield be imposed which the pilots would have to round below a maximum altitude in order to be seen from the ground. With the use of three classes starting one after the other, it should be possible to have the class that started first coming back to such a turn point relatively shortly after the start of the last class to keep the attention of the public awake most of the time.
- A bonus point could be provided to the first pilot in a group to round a turn point to encourage competition between the pilots.
- The Finish Line should be positioned to allow the gliders to fly over the airfield and then join the circuit to land to maximise their exposure for public and media viewing.

We are convinced that this concept will help to make gliding more popular and will probably also increase pilot's fun. We therefore believe that the IGC should not wait until 2005 to test it and should call for a bid for organization such an event as soon as possible.

Note: A similar concept could be applied if gliding is accepted at the World Games to be hold in 2005 in Duisburg (Germany) The only difference would be that the number of participants would be smaller (only around 10 pilots will be invited at the costs of the organizers) and that the duration of the competition will be very short (a few days) so that it will no longer be necessary to run the competition with qualifications and finals.

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