



Strategic Planning in CIVA

Few exchanges were raised during 2022 among members of the Strategic Planning Working Group regarding specific topics requiring action or found to be in need of review. It should be clear to everyone involved in international and domestic aerobatic competitions worldwide however that some key elements have changed forever from the historic norms we remember, and to ignore these trends would be a big mistake. In the past few years a range of strategic topics for aerobatic championship improvement have been reviewed but so far none has survived the examination process. Our sport depends primarily on competitor desire, ability and freedom to participate with the fair likelihood of a fulfilling experience, linked to acceptable costs.

Looking back through the five 2022 CIVA championships it is notable that while each event was run to a good standard and we believe was suitably rewarding for competitors, the number of entries received in every case was not as high as expected. This led inevitably to restricted budgets and greater pressure on organisers to balance their finances.

Other FAI commission Presidents and the IOC view as relayed by FAI is that sport attendance worldwide in 2022 is subdued in most sectors, though where commercial influences are more dominant – e.g. motor racing and many types of ball games – positive attendance has been maintained. Aerobatic contests have rarely achieved marketable status however, the skills and technicalities of our sport not transferring easily into the public imagination.

The influences that appear most relevant are –

1. **Covid.** This virus has had a deeper and longer-lasting impact on us all than many appreciate. It has compromised freedoms and affected careers and personal funds across all social classes. It will in some form be with us for many years.
2. **Carbon-fibre.** Since some point in the 1990's the prevalence of super-strong composites in aerobatic a/c has driven an extraordinary increase in their capability, but with considerable added cost. In every category now from Club/Basic/Beginners upwards the standard training and contest machine is often a 300hp carbon-wing monoplane of some type, and the cost to train and compete has soared. This has put most of the cheaper-to-operate legacy equipment still available at an uncomfortable disadvantage, and their presence in all competitions is notably reduced. Even at Intermediate where the focus was always to attract older a/c that would compete on a fair basis this has failed to avoid the inevitable dominance of new technology.
3. **World Politics.** Whatever your governmental views the RUS/UKR situation has for all of us triggered a significant squeeze on the level of private finance available for sport, especially at the level we enjoy with aerobatics. At least for the time being it has also removed a key contributing nation from all events.

4. **The Swift-S1 glider.** Despite its 1970's heritage the clear advantages provided by this single-seat glider are unavoidable. Their number however is steadily reducing, and currently no realistic plans exist to resurrect manufacture or create a suitable alternative – from a marketing perspective this is in any case extremely unlikely.

None of the above is likely to change any time soon. It has become increasingly important therefore that sporting regulators such as CIVA carefully review every aspect of competition structures with a view to improving the outlook for competitors and easing the financial and managerial burden for organisers. The challenge and reward of aerobatic competition must however remain intact – this is fundamental to our commitment and enjoyment.

What should we do?

Most importantly it is crucial that we work to avoid perpetuating historic rules and processes simply because they are there. CIVA Championship Regulations and all the associated practices that have developed through sixty years of highly constructive input from the very best resources – our pilots, Delegates and officials – are our foundation. Nothing however is sacred, if better solutions are possible then we must all work together to integrate any benefits can be achieved. A key aspect of this is we must all recognise that incremental change is not always the best way forward; fresh/clear thinking for the right reasons may be more difficult, but can often provide better solutions.

Our new Governance Document is important, and will mature over time. Without doubt it will exert a major influence on official responsibilities and, we hope, help everyone with future developments. Every aspect of the CIVA way of life requires diligent attention from all of us, not just those we elect to official positions of trust.

Some key points to consider

For competitors

- a) Talk to them! They provide the real reason for everything we do. Other aspects of championships are most enjoyable, but without competitors we have nothing.
- b) How can we develop the technical and skill-based demands of our championship structure to improve the challenge and reward while keeping the crucially important top class World and European status unchanged, or even improved?
- c) The traditional good-quality championship accommodation and inclusive food arrangements are much appreciated, but contribute significantly to costs and therefore to entry fees. The situation at domestic events is very different, the responsibility for all of this resting solely with the competitor. Moving to a similar operational basis at major international events could provide a welcome boost to the number of pilots prepared to make the big commitment.

For CIVA

- a) The number of Judges and their Assistants, plus the Chief Judge and his entourage and also the standard FAI three-person International Jury, typically amounts to a twenty person hotel and food commitment. Is it really necessary to have seven judges? Can the Chief Judge be a 'working' judge rather than just a manager? If we were to change for example to five Judges + Assistants, including a scoring CJ, and

allow one Jury member to stay at home, this would reduce the funding commitment for organiser by as much as 40% - would that be acceptable from a sporting viewpoint? My Intermediate paper discusses this matter.

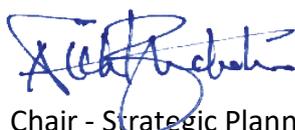
- b) Is the range and type of programme in each category appropriate, or might a fresh review provide a degree of simplicity and improved interest for pilots and even ease the organiser's task? There are proposals this year to exchange at least one of the Free Unknowns for a pre-selected version, which could be simpler to operate and possibly fairer to judge ... the debate and potential decision is yours.

For organisers

- a) From the content of the FAI Organiser Agreement to the demands of the CIVA rulebook, what can we all do to simplify processes and costs while maintaining the necessary high level of interest and challenge for competitors?
- b) The subject of accommodation and refreshments for competitors should be a key focus. This has been better managed at glider events, power organisers please note.
- c) There are many elements that contribute to programme complexity that may be unnecessary, traditional requirements that with insight and good planning could perhaps be simplified with benefits for all.

These are all my views of course. I trust that they will spark discussion and peoples' imagination to look in some other directions; nothing should be 'off the table'.

Always bear in mind the possibility that at some future point in time with an even more pressing lack of competitors we might be saying "If only we had thought smarter and acted sooner"! All of the foregoing is in our hands, no-one should hold back when the need to improve the content and management of our affairs is on the table.



Chair - Strategic Planning Group 2022

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