

## Report of the Strategic Working Group

Last year a comprehensive strategy paper was circulated by Castor Fantoba with a series of recommendations for us all to consider in detail. Castor subsequently made a presentation to the 2018 plenary conference in Warsaw that picked-out the most important of these subjects, and asked delegates for their vote in each case. Most of the responses were positive, and we had some confidence that an interesting set of exchanges would develop as delegates, pilots and others around the world reviewed each of the subjects and made their points of view known. Castor's original strategy document (see item 6.3 [here](#) from the 2018 plenary) included a questionnaire so that interested parties could respond directly to him with their views.

The subjects presented in this strategy paper were:

For glider aerobatics -

1. Glider Aerobatics as an Olympic Sport

For power and glider aerobatics -

1. Change the calendar of CIVA meetings from 1 to 4 per year
2. Decide which philosophy to follow to define a long-term strategy for the sport
3. Unify all WAC and EAC Competitions into a single non-gender result
4. Create a World and Continental Ranking for pilots
5. Change the names of the aerobatic categories
6. Create a "CIVA Certificate of Performance"
7. Introduce Commercial Teams for World and European Championships
8. Establish – a Pilot Representative in CIVA
9. – a Judge Representative in CIVA
10. Develop a valid Sponsoring Policy
11. Establish a CIVA Approved Training Centre

So far a relatively low level of interest has been expressed in support for or opposition to each of the subject areas, though some feedback has reached us to enable modest progress with glider (1) and power (3), (4) and (7).

In summary the present situation is –

For glider aerobatics:

1. **Glider aerobatics as an Olympic Sport.** Research into the processes that must be successfully completed to elevate a sport into an Olympic category has shown that significant existing success must be demonstrated regarding the number of participants already engaged worldwide in the sport, coupled to good potential in the range of newcomers likely to be drawn to it, with proven support from the media, sponsors and established national centres of excellence. The process clearly demands significant commercial potential for the sport, and it soon becomes clear that this is not currently appropriate for glider aerobatics. Active pursuit of this subject has therefore ceased.

For power and glider aerobatics:

1. **Multiple annual plenary conferences.** The annual CIVA plenary conference presents a considerable exercise in personal logistics for each attendee. Various additional possibilities in online proposal assessments and voting processes have been considered, however experience shows that these internet-based systems typically offer a low level of involvement or presence to each remote participant, tend to move slowly through the subjects being considered, and are unable to offer the degree of robust debate that we demand to approve or deny significant regulatory changes. We must also bear in mind that throughout the aerobatic championship season NACs, pilots, teams and trainers rely on a stable set of rules and regulations, and the freedom to revise or change much of significance between plenaries is limited. For the time being therefore review of this subject has been concluded with no action taken.
2. **Long term strategic philosophy.** The operational format of CIVA's championships has been established over a grand period of 60 years in response to an extensive range of inputs and suggestions. The key question posed by Castor is whether these formats have become stale and outlived their effectiveness, or should CIVA be actively trialling alternative approaches that could offer significantly improved public, media and sponsor opportunities that we are clearly not achieving at present while maintaining the spirit of the sport at the current high level. Some other motor sports have made huge improvements to their success on the world sporting stage through the introduction of radical changes in the way they operate, and the question is: could and should CIVA adopt a similar strategy and thereby seek to elevate and improve the world of competition aerobatics? This is a complex and demanding subject, and so far we have not reached consensus on how we could – maybe should – implement such changes.
3. **Adopt single gender competitions.** In discussion (see agenda item 9.1) the Rules Committee has again confirmed its view that to cease operating separate men and women divisions at major championships would simply reduce the opportunities for media and possible sponsor support for female pilots, and therefore the proposal remains not approved.
4. **Pilot Ranking Systems.** This topic was addressed several years ago and again during the past year, without success. While the mechanics of a spreadsheet-based logic system for a pilot ranking list are not too formidable, agreement at senior level regarding a) the need for it, and b) how it should be constructed and operated has so far not been reached. It remains however a tantalising subject with real potential, as demonstrated by various other air-sports, so the item remains open pending further constructive input.
5. **Category name changes.** Our Unlimited, Advanced and Intermediate contest categories are well established throughout the world of aerobatics. Interestingly the introduction of Moto-GP, Moto-2 and Moto-3 in place of the previous category titles has clearly been extremely successful for the world of motor cycle racing. If a suitable set of catchy and workable new names were identified and found to be acceptable for our categories, for example Aero-GP, Aero-2 and Aero-3, then they could certainly be considered. So far however general agreement in the need for such a change has not been achieved.

6. **A CIVA Certificate of Performance.** If other key parts of this wide-ranging set of proposals were significantly developed and materially supported, notably including items 10 and 11 below, this practical suggestion would clearly rise in strategic value. If well structured and defined it could provide an excellent focus for item-11. Until such time however the need for and potential benefits of such a scheme would be marginal, and a financial supporting structure demanded that at present we simply do not enjoy.
7. **Commercial Teams.** This interesting subject was aired at a previous plenary; it received little support on that occasion, and has therefore been put to one side until and unless other related matters develop and render it viable for further consideration.
8. **Establish a Pilot Representative in CIVA.** The suggestion is that as competitors are the primary focus of the sport they should be represented by an independent voice within the CIVA structure. A new Working Group would probably be the most suitable vehicle for this, populated by a number of representative pilots with one nominated as their chairman. A selection process throughout the active power and glider pilot community each year would be most appropriate to provide the necessary names.
9. **Establish a Judge Representative in CIVA.** This item in many respects parallels the above suggestion, though our judges already work within a well-established appraisal and selection process managed by the Judging Committee and its chairman. Whether CIVA judges actually require an independent voice and how this would work alongside existing JC procedures is perhaps not so clear.
10. **Sponsoring Policy.** A policy as described in Castor's proposal could undoubtedly become crucial if the strength and depth of commercial sponsorship in championship aerobatics were to rise sufficiently to require an appropriate degree of regulation. It could certainly provide focus and potential structure where little or none exists at present; to ignore it could therefore be viewed as a complacent reaction, though the 'chicken-and-egg' nature of such considerations in the context of various other similarly relevant matters will always be finely balanced.
11. **CIVA approved Training Centres.** In the event that some of all of the above items are achieved and a degree of maturity is reached, a wider set of viable business opportunities could soon emerge to underpin the commercial development of pilot training in our sport. The need for aerobatic training centres offering critique and feedback to pilots so their performances in open competition could steadily move to a higher standard would be clear. Currently the market for such ventures is not sufficient, and the need for CIVA to rationalise and approve their standards therefore not yet a concern. One day maybe ... see item-6 also in this context.

We should extend our thanks to Castor for diligently raising and detailing these subjects, and be sure to regularly re-appraise them to recognise if and when they do become more relevant.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nick Buckenham'.

Nick Buckenham