



**FAI Aerobatics Commission (CIVA)  
Annual Plenary Meeting 2019  
Duxford, United Kingdom**

**Chief Judge's Report – the 30<sup>th</sup> FAI WAC 2019**

Châteauroux-Déols Air Base, France

21<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019



Chief Judge: Nick Buckenham (GBR) with Leif Culpin and Jen Buckenham.

Judges: Esteban Moulin (BEL) with Alain Dugas, Violeta Gedminaitė (LTU) with Vytautas Tautkevičius, Guy Auger (FRA) with Jean Claude Leboulanger, Jürgen Leukefeld (GER) with Willy Gruhier, Marty Flournoy (USA) with John Wacker, Quintin Hawthorne (RSA) with Laszlo Liskay and Vladimir Kotelnikov (RUS) with Mikhail Bezdenezhnykh.

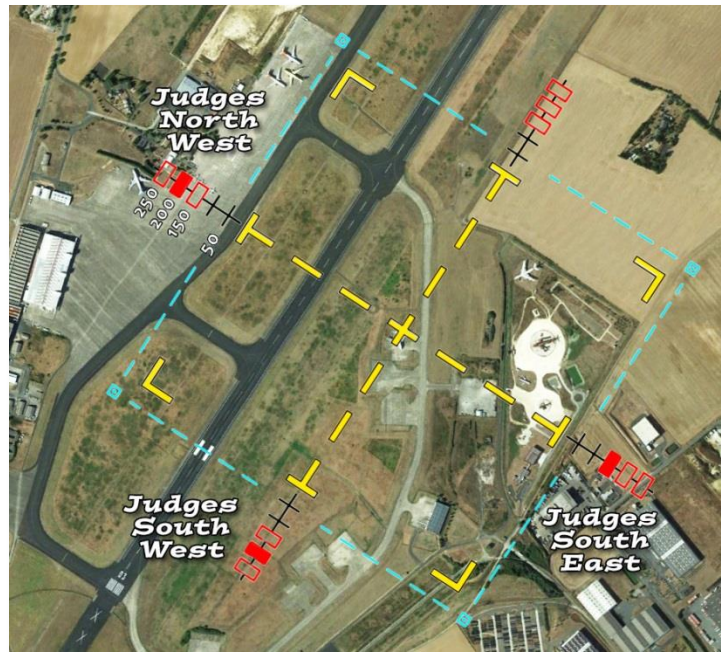
This prestigious event had attracted an excellent entry of over 60 pilots, a higher number than any World Aerobatic Championship since Trencin in 1998 and slightly more than the previous WAC held at this excellent airfield in 2015. Once again the championship drew significant crowds, said by the organisers to exceed 17,000 on the final Friday.

**The Performance Zone**

Despite this being a large aerodrome with commercial origins it is only just possible to accommodate the 1km square performance zone and site the judges at least 150m from the box near edge. The orientation of the single 3,500 by 45m runway is 03/21° and to avoid the judges looking into the sun it is necessary to reposition them between the morning and afternoon sessions using two of the three available locations. In fact only the south-east position is usable from 09:00 each day unless complete cloud cover can be assured, and

from about 14:00 it becomes necessary to move to either the south-west or north-west position. The airport also accommodates various large commercial aircraft including two non-flying Boeing 747's, one of which is permanently parked in the east quadrant; as in 2015 this necessitated raising the box 'Low' limit to 120m.

The equipment provided to accommodate the judging panel was to a good standard, and the team in charge was able to move it quickly to each position as the need arose, normally during the lunch break after 13:00 each day when the south-east position became unusable due to the orientation of the sun and operation from either the south-west or north-west position became necessary.



The south-east judging position could be reached only via public roads, a trip of about 10 minutes by car. This location was in a small field within an industrial estate where there were tall buildings to the judges left, which marginally compromised sight of low flying aircraft in the box to that side. Unfortunately a loud alarm was triggered and lasted throughout the whole of the Saturday, though this was eventually cleared by the police.

Rather surprisingly and unknown to us the organisers had arranged for a 'secretary' to work with each CIVA appointed judge and assistant to manage the score-sheet on their behalf. I initially suspected that due to language difficulties this could impede the judges' natural work-flow, but reappraisal after the first programme started showed that these issues could be overcome and the secretaries remained helpfully in place throughout the whole event.

### Video recordings

The video operator appeared to use a good standard of equipment, but the on-screen result was often not stable enough and it was sometimes difficult to validate indistinct matters of fact such as point rolls etc. Initially the time of each flight was used in conjunction with the flying order to identify competitors, but this was soon revised to the more normal solution where a brief opening shot is made of a displayed flight number. To play-back these recordings while at the judging location the video operator was encouraged to erect some black-out curtains around the back of the supplies



van, and in conjunction with a large television monitor these provided a good standard of display, though in a very confined space, for the judges to review specific factual aspects of a flight when necessary.

### **Warm-Up Pilots**

Two warm-up pilots were available throughout the event, both flying EA-330SC aircraft, and they shared these duties to a high standard. Both were non-team French pilots as prior efforts to secure W/U pilots from other countries seemed positive at first but had ultimately been unsuccessful. It is important not only that the warm-up pilots are thoroughly competent, but they must also be able to incorporate subtle errors into their performances as requested by the Chief Judge in order that the judging panel can be tested in a realistic manner. I used both pilots for the panel currency exam before the event started, providing a realistic and effective test of the judges' abilities to spot misleading elements. As the event progressed it appeared there was some pressure from the French team to avoid 'mistakes' in their flying, but on the whole the warm-up duties were extremely well handled.

### **The Final Freestyle**

Although the original intention was to run this programme split into several sections during the Saturday flying display, that approach was abandoned in favour of a single exercise late on the last full day of the championship. Due to display arrivals and their practice periods that afternoon however we were unable to start the Freestyle until almost 18:00. It was paramount to ensure a smooth and continuous flow of the 20 selected competitors in order that completion before last light could be guaranteed. A 'Hold' area was therefore identified about a kilometre to the west of the box, with the competitors scheduled to take-off one flight ahead of their slot and allowed complete their safety-maneuvres there so they were fully prepared and could quickly reposition to commence their performance when called. This solution proved very effective, and all twenty flights – less one pilot who crossed the deadline and was immediately grounded by the jury – were successfully completed just before 20:00.

This was the first year for the all-new Final Freestyle regulations, adopted by plenary in 2018 with the aim of providing a simpler set of judging criteria that also included assessment of the smoke and audio-track for the first time.

The intention was for judges to complete their score-sheets and submit them to the Chief Judge immediately after each flight, as is done for classic performances, but for this initial occasion it was agreed that the sheets would be collected after the final flight had been completed as had been the procedure in the past.

The audio track was transmitted on the safety frequency from a position adjacent to the Chief Judge's desk so it could immediately be interrupted in case safety messages were required. Most of the freestyle flying was to a good standard, though as expected it soon





became clear that only some pilots have the time and dedicated training regimes to mount a successful challenge in this very different and highly technical arena. The programme provided excellent 'theatre' however for all those who experienced it, and it was agreed that the new format bodes well for future freestyle events.

### **Score-sheet transmission to the Scoring Office**

At my suggestion a mobile-phone (mounted on an adjustable stand from Amazon!) was used to take photos of each set of judging sheets when they had been approved following the performance, these image sets being transmitted immediately via WhatsApp to the scoring office. This enabled the scorer to read the judges grades from the received images and enter them by hand very shortly after each flight, and by this means the results were quickly updated throughout the entire event. The scoring team were thus able to provide a high standard of rapid results management that was much appreciated by the competitors, the officials and all other event attendees. An added bonus of this solution is the electronic storage of a complete 'back-up' set of score-sheet image copies to guard against inadvertent paper-sheet loss.



### **Incidents and the Jury**

There were two occasions when I found it necessary to express my concern to the International Jury to for them to handle unusual situations –

- It was my opinion that the skills and capability of one pilot did not appear to provide a sufficient standard of safety to successfully compete at this event, especially when looking forward to the Free Unknown programmes when figures can be unusually complex and good energy management is paramount. The pilot concerned was encouraged by the jury to fly higher and informed that they would monitor his performances, and ultimately my concerns were resolved.
- In another flight no contact could be established with the pilot despite repeated radio calls from the ground, including by the jury member present at the judging line. This pilot subsequently entered the performance zone and flew the normal safety manoeuvres followed by the first three figures of the sequence, then – still without radio contact – departed to land. This competitor was subsequently disqualified from the programme, but allowed to continue for the remainder of the event.

I am satisfied that the flying and judging throughout this championship was to a good standard, and the calculated results accurately reflect the very high scores that were achieved by the top pilots.

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

Nick Buckenham, Chief Judge