

## **WAC 2017 Malelane, South Africa – Contest Director’s Report**

### **Background**

It was the intention of the Sport Aerobatic Club (a section of the Aero Club of South Africa) to break new ground, not only by staging a World Aerobatic Championships in Africa for the first time, but to try and develop new social contacts, by housing all competitors, judges and officials in the same hotel. Originally the contest was intended to be at the Hoedspruit Airforce Base in Limpopo, with accommodation at the Swadini Holiday Resort, however logistical and security issues required a change to the Malelane Airport and Pestana Kruger Lodge Hotel in Mpumalanga.

The Malelane Airport is privately owned and used mainly by business jets and light aircraft, there are no scheduled flights, training schools etc. and the airport is outside of controlled airspace. This gave SAC the possibility to hold its championship with a minimum of interference from outside parties. The main Pestana Kruger Lodge Hotel is situated only 4km from the airport and is on the border of the World-famous Kruger Park, with a viewing deck giving the opportunity to view wild animals at both breakfast and dinner. This facility was much appreciated by all concerned.

### **Training**

Unlike at most aerobatic championships, where teams train mostly at independent airfields, the fact that there was a much higher level of shared aircraft than normal, caused the organiser to develop a plan based on the contest site itself.

Eventually, three performance sites were activated, two at the Malelane Contest site itself, with the official contest performance zone and another situated 2.5km away, a further site at a separate airfield (River Bend) approximately 5km away, where teams had the option of landing if they wished. However, for the purposes of refuelling and hangarage, Malelane was used as the main base, this caused some detailed scheduling to take place, but overall the system was very successful.

The organisers also made a package available, including fuel and accommodation. This was taken up by most of the teams involved. Training continued without incident until the arrivals day at 13:00 or one hour before the general briefing.

### **The Contest**

In general, all briefings took place at the contest hotel, commencing at 07:30 every morning, thus allowing competitors to have some flexibility with their breakfast and when they transferred to the competition site. Target for the launch of the warm up pilots was 08:30 each morning, the preferred judging position and normally with the prevailing wind was to the northern position, in this position the judges could remain all day without having issues with

the sun. If the wind was measured as cross box, the eastern position was used up to 13:00, whereupon the position was changed to the west after lunch.

With the preferred judging position to the north, the judge's equipment could be left in position overnight, as this was within the boundary of the airport fences, which in turn facilitated a much faster set up every morning.

The judging position to the north was slightly closer to the performance zone than recommended in the CIVA Regulations, but was determined by the terrain and the need to place the box markers.

An "Emergency Response Plan" was put in place with the assistance of the Malelane Municipality and the Mpumalanga Provisional Authorities, though fortunately they were not called upon in any significant manner.

The fact that Malelane has no taxi-way, called for take-offs to be initiated from the eastern end of the runway adjacent to the apron. Landings were predominantly made from the westerly direction, with the landing aircraft taxiing past the aircraft awaiting take-off and holding short of the runway, whereupon the departing aircraft lined up awaiting departure clearance, once off the ground the landed aircraft cleared the runway. This system, which was in place from the second day of the contest, allowed only one aircraft in the air at a time and erred on the side of caution.

Shortly after the start of the contest, the contest organisation was compromised when scoring director Natalie Stark was seriously injured in a car accident on the highway at the entrance to the airport. Fortunately the onsite emergency facilities handled the situation immediately and Natalie was swiftly released from the wreckage and dispatched to hospital. Contest Administrator Quintin Hawthorne quickly stepped in to replace Natalie, Natalie's father Mike also could not continue as an assistant Judge, so assistant Contest Director Irma Janciukiene (an experienced assistant) replaced him on the judging line, thus the contest organisation was down two persons, it was actually worse as Natalie's mother Charlotte also helping at the event was also now missing. Fortunately, Jury Member Vladimir Machula stepped in and assisted with the contest paperwork, this was much appreciated.

Possibly as a result of the above situation, some confusion about paperwork for the 1<sup>st</sup> Unknown Programme occurred, effecting three South African pilots, competitor Barrie Eeles was given a HZ for his tail slide having flown a canopy down instead of a canopy up, it transpired that this was different from the sequence as submitted to the organisation, but it had been re-entered overnight, in fairness the person entering his paperwork had given a copy to Barrie at the early morning briefing and asked him to sign, which he did without checking thoroughly as he should have done. Obviously, Barrie was devastated, having submitted correctly originally, I discussed the situation with Jury President Alan Cassidy and as a result offered a re-flight, this was explained at a pilot briefing, the decision however was mine alone.

The contest continued as planned, although a half day was lost due to adverse weather conditions. It became apparent that there was a chance for all programmes to be flown by all pilots, the organisers made a determined effort to achieve this. The jury introduced the normal mandatory cut for the last unknown programme, but it was always the intention to fly all the competitors, in order to facilitate this briefing was held at 07:00 on the last scheduled day for the unknowns. Flying continued all day, with a shortened lunch break, the last competitor flew late afternoon with the light failing fast, but within contest regulations.

This I believe is the first WAC where all programmes have been flown by all the competitors.

That evening a severe storm hit the area and it looked like for a time into the following day, that it would not be possible to fly the Final Freestyle Programme. However, this time was put to good use, and the judges were taken into the Kruger Park as the guests of the organisers.

The only flying incident occurred when competitor Mike Ciliberti experienced illness during his flight. He managed to land without further incident, was assisted by the contest medical staff to leave the aircraft and was immediately taken to hospital where he remained overnight for observation. He subsequently withdrew from the event.

By midmorning of the final day, the weather had improved so that the Final Freestyle Programme could take place, the wind determined that the western judging position would be used. This programme was completed in full without incident, thus bringing the contest to its completion.

### **Closing Ceremony**

The closing ceremony took place on the terrace of the hotel, though all did not go to plan and there was a very unfortunate incident involving the incorrect national anthem being played for the French Team. The Sport Aerobatic Club of South Africa can only offer its sincere apologies for this incident, all that be said is that the organisation had been placed in the hands of a responsible Committee Member and he had buckled under pressure. This was not in character with the individual concerned, who is both a professional airline and aerobatic pilot.

On a different note, Robert Holland has won the Final Freestyle for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive contest, yet had failed to receive the Manfred Strossenreuther Trophy, which has been missing since awarded to Zach Heffley of the USA in Granada, Spain. The organisers whilst not being able to duplicate the original trophy, did get sponsored a one-off trophy to be retained by Robert Holland.

The replacement of the Strossenreuther Trophy is on the agenda of this year's CIVA Plenary meeting.

## **General Conclusion**

The Sport Aerobatic Club considers it achieved its overall objective of staging an Unlimited World Aerobatic Championships in South Africa, and fulfilled its ambition to create an environment, where all the people involved had the opportunity to meet and socialise

It had always been anticipated, that the entry level would be lower than normal due to the location, this led to a shorter contest being planned, also day light hours are shorter in this latitude, so long delays for organisational issues could not be tolerated.

Fortunately, everything went mainly to plan and despite a day and a half lost to adverse weather, the contest was flown out to its full extent, with even the initially cut pilots in the 3<sup>rd</sup> unknown being able to fly. So, apart from the events that occurred at the closing ceremony, as Contest Director, I feel satisfied with the championship.

John Gaillard