

Show and Tell.

A UK National Competitions Promotional Event.

Show and Tell:

Show and Tell, a one day promotional event for the BMAA National Microlight Competitions, was first run in April 2013 by Rich Rawes and Chris Wills. It was designed to encourage participation in National Competitions by demonstrating some of the types of task and how to approach them. The event was mainly publicised through the BMAA monthly magazine, Microlight Flying, with other material on the BMAA and National Microlight Competitions websites.

Participants flew in on the Saturday morning and could take part in up to 3 navigation tasks and a BBQ lunch. All the tasks were non-competitive, each of approximately one hour duration containing known tracks, hidden gates, photos, declared groundspeed and elapsed time at turn point elements. There were full explanations of what the different elements of a task required and how to plan to fly them. Having been briefed on the each task and had explanations of what to consider and how to plan and prepare, experienced competition pilots continued to talk with crews and individuals on a one to one basis offering practical advice, checking that all aspects were understood, that planning was proceeding correctly and that each crew or individual was properly prepared and happy before flying each task. There was a take-off window for each task after the briefing and planning. Each aircraft was provided with a BMAA logger for the day so that tracks could be checked after each task as well as photos being marked. Tracks were available to view after each task for evaluation.

The overall feel for the event was very relaxed, non-competitive and instructional. Although only navigation tasks were flown, as they are easier to organise and to tackle by novices, fuel and precision tasks were also discussed. The experienced competition pilots on hand were very happy to answer any questions general and specific, and talked positively about competitions, both National and International.

During the day all participants were encouraged to register for the upcoming competitions, the first being five weeks after Show and Tell.

Attendance:

A total of 13 aircraft took part in the event, mainly flown dual. The experience levels ranged from some who had only gained their licence very recently to those who had been flying for several years. Some had taken part in a few competitions before without any structured introduction or tutoring in competition flying, for others it was their first taste.

Post Show and Tell 2013:

In the intervening weeks Show and Tell participants were contacted by the experienced pilots to support and encourage them. When at the competitions, novices, whether they'd attended Show and Tell or not, were mentored by experienced pilots in the same class or with similar performance aircraft. Mentors worked with novices almost to the expense of their own competition. I know from personal experience that this was enormously helpful and greatly appreciated. Unfortunately at the time of writing this I do not have definite figures for the numbers of Show and Tell participants that subsequently went to compete in 2013, but believe it to be significantly over 50%.

Publicity:

After the event a feature article appeared in the monthly magazine and Steve Cook the BMAA publicity officer made a video of the day which was available on various websites and YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXVtHV9vJMQ&feature=youtu.be>

Copies of the three tasks are also attached as is the article published in Microlight Flying after the event.

Show and Tell through 2014 and on:

Two Show and Tell days were scheduled for 2014, one in the South of the country one in the North, to run simultaneously in April. The numbers registered increased to 25 over the two events with even a waiting list created for the Southern event. Unfortunately and despite a contingency weekend scheduled just in case, the weather prevented any activity taking place at the Southern venue. In the North the weather prevented any flying taking place, though a ground school on task planning was run with just under half of those registered taking part. The feedback was good and a competition ground school is being considered again in the future. An option would be to run some ground schools on types of task, preparation, elements to practice and other aspects of competitions at the Flying Show in the winter.

Show and Tells are being planned for 2015 in both North and South locations. Under discussion is a summer date for the events. The intention being to improve the chances of them not being cancelled due to weather, whilst still leaving at least one competition left for people to take part in. Competitions towards the end of the season tend to have a drop off in numbers so this might work well to bring numbers to these later season events.

Very recently, we've begun to consider running a single nav task or spot landings, or even a slimmed down version of Show and Tell at already established fly-in events. Single nav tasks have been run successfully in the past at fly-ins. A possible format would be to run an open briefing during the morning with the task to be flown as and when the participant chooses. There would be a marking time slot perhaps between 5 and 6pm when anyone who'd flown the task could have their task marked and discuss their performance. After that the results would be published along with the photo locations etc for others to self-mark. This would also serve to continue the publicity. A simplified spot landing task still to be fully devised could also be offered to perhaps 20 aircraft on a first come first served basis. The advantage of a spot landing task is that spectators can watch.

Further general actions throughout the 2013 & 14 seasons:

Show and Tell was the first of several initiatives that year and in fact sparked off several more, all intended to raise the profile and awareness of competitions from 2013 into 2014. A commitment was made to ensure a feature piece and pictures would be published in the BMAA monthly magazine after each competition or event, and a member of the competition committee took the responsibility of ensuring this happened. Authors of these articles come from a broad range of competition experiences and participation. They include first time and experienced competitors, pilots and navigators and organisers. The hope is that a broader audience will identify with a broader range of contributors, capturing the imagination of readers by recounting the whole experience of a competition weekend, the social side, the areas visited, the flavours different organisers bring, journeys to and from the competition, not just task information and competition results. There are anecdotal results that these do have an effect, with competitors relating that they are influenced by the articles to find out more or take part. One particular pilot flying in WL1, on the basis of reading an article took part in the final competition of 2013 and two competitions of in 2014, coming second in one of them.

With information being somewhat anecdotal and based on opinion, another initiative was to run a survey to gain more accurate data if possible. The survey was sent out to as many as possible, mainly via a posting on the comps forum website, a yahoo group which has been established and in use for a number of years.

The survey was open to anyone with any level of interest/experience in competitions. The purposes of the survey were quite simple;

1/ To collect information and reference material to use internally to understand how people relate to the competitions, their feelings towards them, the perceived benefits and relevance, their likes and dislikes. It's not necessarily that things might simply be changed to alleviate the dislikes of competitor, you might consider that you are doing the right thing, just not explaining and publicising the reasons or benefits properly.

2/ To compile quantitative information that can be used with and by supporters, governing bodies and sponsors to promote competitions. Initially numbers might seem small, but until you start measuring, you simply don't know. Once you start measuring, you can start recording then you can identify trends.

3/ To gather anecdotal information for the promotion of competitions to the above and to potential participants, supporters and event organisers. Once again, although it is still anecdotal, you can now state who said what about what event.

4/ To fish for ideas and sound bites, which could be used to improve or promote competitions. To have as large a pool as possible provides the best opportunities for good ideas. Word of mouth and personal endorsement are the best forms of advertising.

In the case of point 1 above, a particular issue raised was scoring and how important it was for task scores to come out quickly and competition results and prize giving to take place on Sunday. The response to the survey told the comps group that it is an extremely important issue for competitors. This led to a featured part of competition organisation, that methods and practices to quickly and accurately mark tasks be an important consideration and goal of organisers. The results being published as soon as possible has led to an energised and exciting atmosphere at the competitions during 2014. It might seem obvious, but the reminder of the obvious is helpful.

Contributors to the survey remained anonymous to viewers of the results which were published openly on the competitions website. Anonymity of contributors was maintained to promote honesty in responses, though the identity of people completing surveys was gathered confidentially as way of checking the validity of responses.

Whilst not hugely scientific in its design or analysis it has proved useful and informative, and a copy is attached.

As with most things, one thing leads on to another, and another particular reason and use for the survey was to generate material to use on the competitions stand at the Flying Show very much as in point 4 above. The 2013 season was very successful for the UK national comps with all 4 competitions taking place as well as the Show and Tell. The stand space was provided by and shared with the BMAA technical department, who were displaying a Shadow restored by one of their members. The Shadows restoration had been featured in a number of magazine articles aimed at promoting affordable flying so was a great draw. The stand was designed to be bright, eye catching, warm and attractive. The main thrust of the comps stand was to present; via wall mounted screen, a

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slide show of images and video from the season, mounted still images of all aspects of the competitions, all of the published articles about the competitions, a full range of quotes from the survey as to what people enjoyed about the comps and why they took part, wall mounted charts marked with the task track and accompanied by the task and photo sheets from every task from every comp that year. The slide show proved a very arresting display. The overlapping charts covering virtually all the UK and with task and transit tracks marked also proved a great draw. The intention, which seemed to work well, was to provide a full view of the 2013 season which reminded and excited those who had taken part and provided every tool possible at hand to be used by those on the stand to enthuse about the comps when talking to prospective new participants as they stopped to look. The next step on the stand was to gather email addresses of those who had showed an interest to build up a list of prospective participants, supporters and followers so as to continue to contact them.

When the names and emails gathered at the flying show were merged with existing ones held, a mailing list of just over 200 was created. This group receives a newsletter with information, some exclusive, news and details of how to and when to get involved with comps and various events through-out the year. A particular strategy with the newsletter is not to send it simply on a regular schedule, but as and when there is information to impart and a 'call to action' can be issued. Typically once registration for a competition is opened, a newsletter is sent out and then another much closer to the weekend. If there was a specific angle or aspect to the competition that might make it particularly interesting then it is included. As the competitions passed then results and stories are included to keep people informed.

The newsletters purpose is to maintain awareness and interest, not letting competitions drift too from the consciousness of not only participants, but also governing and supporting bodies. This is particularly important during the off season.

The newsletter was expanded to experiment with using Twitter as a 'live feed' during the WMC this year in Hungary. Despite teething troubles through inexperience using Twitter and internet connection in Hungary, it appeared to be very well received by those following.

2013 also saw a new competition take place organised jointly between a local pilot and another pilot remotely. The competition tested a new system of gold, silver and bronze entrants. Gold was the official competition for experienced competition pilots and crew, who's score would count towards the national league and was as per the competition regulations including required eligibility to compete. Silver for was for those who had some experience, but would like a little extra help. Bronze was for newcomers who would require more definite help and instruction. Apart from eligibility for gold, pilots could choose which stream to compete in. All attended the first briefing, with subsequent briefings for silver and bronze where extra advice and help was available from the organisers. Silver and bronze were also able to receive wider angle photos and details of any unknown track elements. Quarantine between these groups was self-monitored. The grading worked well and was appreciated by silver and bronze categories who expressed the opinions that it had made the competition accessible for them. The organisers felt that though it added work to running the event, it was not three times more work and was well worth it.

A new competition was added to the calendar in 2014. The weather made the go/no go decision difficult and left to the last minute, but with 8 aircraft the completion still took place very successfully. Some key features were identified at during the weekend which were of interest and worthy of mentioning. Rather than a sole organiser the group with a lead organiser, very consciously divided the work load including a different person doing the briefing for each task. This had several effects, it did seemed very much to share the work load, was very inclusive of all those organising and presented to the competitors a relaxed, cohesive group which they felt confidence in. Several

very seasoned competition pilots acted as mentors to the organising group prior to the competition to ensure any obvious pitfalls were avoided. During the event one of those pilots continued to act as mentor/steward at the expense of competing himself. Whilst the group was already highly motivated and organised his mentorship was appreciated by both the organisers and competitors alike and the competition ran very smoothly. This role has been identified as extremely important in the development of new competitions and organisers. Not as many local competitors as hoped took part, this might have been due to the weather, but local participation is important in new competitions and remains an area for action. To have the same old hands travelling to more and further afield competitions is not necessarily growth. The group are presently discussing dates for a 2015 competition.

Another group is also scheduled to run their first competition this in 2015. They have a very active club and many of their club members have taken part in competitions over the years. Mainly enthused by the upbeat and positive direction of the competitions and a desire to contribute, they have decided they wish to contribute by organising their own comp.

Regarding Competition organisation and initiatives during 2013, workshops and seminars were planned and offered to prospective new and inexperienced organisers on task design and competition organisation, but to my knowledge they didn't take place. I believe this was due to the small numbers interested and ability to set some definite dates due to the inherent long travel distances required by participants. This is something that might benefit from a concerted effort to promote and organise.

The future:

It is early days to say with confidence what the full effect these initiatives are, the weather for example can skew results significantly. A period of several competition seasons would be required to filter out external forces such as the weather though first indications are of positive growth in both participation and awareness. However even though awareness, participation and support can be turned round in a season, I believe a longer term plan should be continued and implemented to achieve sustainable growth, development and succession of competitors and organisers.

Although there has been no survey to back up this statement, there is a perception that through a culmination of the current activities, forward thinking, publicity and projections of the competition scene, that more people are now aware of the competitions. The comps group has been approached by the editor the monthly magazine about a regular monthly column. Event organisers are becoming aware that having competition style tasks or organisation at their event can bring value and variety. Obviously the return for competitions once again is awareness, in this instance to quite an appropriate audience.

Personal and philosophical observations and reflections:

Possibly more by accident than design a broad and multi-faceted approach has come together as a plan to publicise the UK National comps. Nonetheless, the overall plan does have some simple tenets which I believe are very important.

The first two being, to have a plan and to keep it simple.

Having a plan gives you clear and defined externalised goals and ways of measuring success. Keeping the plan simple helps keep those goals clear and defined. It is also far easier for a group to convey the same few simple messages strongly with many voices.

A clear, consistent and unified voice is essential.

Personally I believe a campaign should seek to simply make as many people as possible aware of competitions. It should be a planned, coordinated and unified approach to raising the profile of competitions. Publicity and information should seek to inform and demonstrate the relevance and benefits of competition flying to everyday flying. Pointing out the enjoyment and confidence that developing and exercising competition skills brings.

Any communication in the form of publicity, newsletter, etc, should always carry clear 'calls to action' on how to get involved from simply following the action on Facebook or Twitter, to coming along to spectate, marshal or compete. These things then need to be backed up with current information, maintained websites, ongoing communications and knowledge of where and what the next step is.

It should all come from the simple raising of awareness first.

I believe most people don't want to fly competitively. It is not simply a matter of giving them a taster or showing them what happens and how to do it then simply expecting them to be converted. For some competitive flying is something they consider alien to safe pleasurable flying. It seems that it causes you to rush or at least have limited time to prepare your flight. Most of us when learning remember uncomfortable occasions, feeling things were happening too fast, that events and the aircraft were ahead of us. This was usually confirmed by our instructor's words 'I have control'. Competitions can create that feeling and in that instance are can be off putting. Some pilots are simply not competitive. Some don't realise that you only need test and improve your own skills by taking part.

Also discouraging is having too high a level of competition or difficulty. To receive no points is demoralising. A case in point for UK National comps has been the introduction of 50% points if on a precision landing you run out of the box. This has been done to still give a reward to novices who are developing their skills.

This leads to another negative aspect to be avoided which falls in line with the clear, consistent and unified voice. Would you wish to join a group which disagrees amongst its self? Despite 50% run out points being something agreed to and ratified in the UK competition organisers guide, it is not something universally applied. Disagreement amongst experienced pilots both during briefings or publicly aired on forum websites about this and other issues has a negative impact. It comes across as disorganised and discordant.

If say, only 2% of pilots ever want to compete then to have 50 new competitors then you need reach 2500 pilots. In doing that you are still making 2500 pilots aware of competitions. Those that I've mentioned before that don't wish to compete, may well still appreciate and enjoy following, supporting and learning from the competitions. The 2% need to be nurtured and supported.

Every current competitor at every instance is an ambassador for the sport. We should be welcoming, engaging, encouraging, supportive, always. We have to share our knowledge, enjoyment and experience to bring on all those around us to be worthy competitors to test ourselves against. If we wish to only arrive and compete, withholding our knowledge and experience for our own advantage, exercising competitive exchanges at every turn, enjoying only winning, then we will be competing in smaller and smaller less satisfying numbers and events.

All the views expressed here are my own and every attempt has been made to ensure that this paper accurately reflects events I was aware of or part of during 2013-14. All the ideas here are the

product of a large group of people dedicated to the UK National Comps, all with far greater knowledge and experience in competitions than me. The ideas and actions have come about from their hard work and desire to see the competitions grow and flourish. Not all ideas succeed, not all ideas are right at the time, and many of them are not even new ideas. But a willingness to openly discuss, adapt, and develop ideas and then support them as group is a fertile ground for growth.

This paper and the experiences it recounts are intended to spur you on to use adapt and develop its ideas as much or as little as you wish. Not only for the promotion and growth of competition flying, but flying in general, indeed any past time you wish. I hope you've enjoyed it, found it useful and that it even inspires you to greater things.

Every small step forward should be celebrated, knock backs should be expected (the weather!) and learnt from. If you don't fall over occasionally then you're not trying hard enough to run faster.

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