

**The World Air Games (WAG) PG Accuracy Test Event 2008, Italy.
Nick Simmons reports from Avigliana.**

Being the best placed UK Paragliding Accuracy Pilot in the WPRS, I was invited to participate in the WAG Test Event in 2008. It was held between 17th – 19th August in Avigliana, Italy, about 20km from Turin. There are two lakes here and the larger one featured a solid, 20m x 20m floating pontoon, firmly anchored about one hundred meters from the shore. This was the target for all incoming aircraft. The organisers were holding the Test Event primarily to understand the logistical requirements for all



four of the HG and PG events that would run concurrently on this site. The PG Accuracy pilots were launching from the mountainside, the PG aerobatics guys were de-bagging from a helicopter, and the speed gliding and aerobatics hang gliders were launched by aerotow. The common factor was the raft landing on the lake!

The practice day allowed us to check out the transport to the take off, and familiarise ourselves with the terrain

and conditions. Take off was a good distance from the target pontoon, across to the other side of the lake. Every pilot was going to have to consider carefully his glide angle, and judge if he has sufficient height to fly across the lake and reach the target. It has to be said that the boat rescue team, strategically located on the water at all times, were reassuringly well equipped and fully alert to each glider's flight path. Getting a dunking would mean all equipment must be dried before the next flight was made. The most critical is the reserve parachute that would need drying fully and repacked. From what I could see, facilities were rather limited for drying and repacking at the lakeside headquarters on the lakeside.

My first flight on the practice day saw me not being able to cross the lake. I estimated my wing's glide ratio (glide angle) at approximately 5:1. This site was (we were told when we arrived) 5.6:1. I was always going to be short unless I found some lift and minimum sink on my flight path to the pontoon. Three others and I landed in a meadow adjacent to the lake.

My second attempt later that day was no better. This time I landed in a small grassed area next to a hotel car park. I was concerned that with my particular glider this event was a non-starter for me. At least two other pilots made it to the pontoon, flying low performance gliders like mine. A brief discussion of the shortcomings (or rather, short landings) concluded that for some of us, this competition was going to depend as much on chance as skill. Not at all what we were used to.

The next day, the first competition round saw four pilots out of 18 not make it to the pontoon. I was one that took an early bath. As expected, the rescue services were by my side immediately and, as I can swim comfortably, there were no problems. Each of the two boats had a fully qualified diver with air bottle, one diver ready with a snorkel, and of course a helmsman. There was also a twin manned, very fast jetski. They were packing various sizes of flotation devices, mainly in case a hang glider opted for a water landing.

I was entitled to a re-flight, so I needed to get my kit dry for my next attempt. I had enough time, as the next round was scheduled for the afternoon. No high-pressured turn-round, like some competitions. Back to the top for my second attempt. The pilot a few launches in front of me certainly looked like he was going to get there.



Sadly, I used the same small lakeside landing field again! Then, another water landing gave the TV and spectators some entertainment. It also kept the rescue guys entertained. I was getting closer to the pontoon and for the first time in my life actually walked on water, if only for three meters. Well, this was the end of the first day for me.

Disastrous as it was, I could only hope for more favourable conditions tomorrow.

We assembled at the commandeered Yacht Club HQ at 08:30 for the daily safety briefing before starting the competition. As this site was also being used by parachutists, acro paragliders and hang gliders, the briefings were important. There was a long discussion about the recommended flight path, emergency landing fields,



reflights, spectator interest and logistics. Despite some disappointments all the competitors recognised the 'demonstration' aspect of the event. And they congratulated the rescue crews on their superb ability to recover so many gliders. I launched at about 11am and was pleased to see pilots before me finding plenty of lift en route to the target across the lake. Luck and conditions were on my side this time as I had more than a thousand feet above the lake. Now I had the enjoyable task of wasting some of the height with some spiral turns. Having slightly misjudged my height, I found myself on the wrong (upwind) side of the pontoon. There was little wind, so I took what I had and managed to score a poor 41cm from the dead centre. Despite this not so great (or bad) score I was pleased to have reached the raft and stayed dry!

Back at launch for the final round. As soon as I took off I was concentrating on getting the maximum glide out of my wing. It was not looking good ahead of me. The first launched pilot was losing a lot of height. He opted for a dry landing on the lakeside. I was now lying fully back to reduce wind resistance, had my hands up high and had full speed-bar on. Would I make it? I was constantly looking at the pontoon and assessing my glide angle – as were the Judges on the target! I had to go for the

target even if it meant getting another dunking. In any case, it would put a smile on a lot of people's faces.

Further into my flight I felt sure I could get there. Half way across the lake I was certain I would stay dry. I remained cautious, though and opted to fly direct to the electronic pad in the middle of the pontoon. At a height of about ten meters I allowed myself to drift down wind a little to give me a good chance of getting on the pad with style and not fall over. Ten meters of height is not very much time to get prepared, but then I had been preparing myself for a quick approach for the last ten minutes.

I applied some brake to check my forward movement and then quickly assessed how best to hit the pad. The judges were all moving towards me as it looked like I would land between five and eight meters short of the pad. At least it would be on the pontoon. I let the brakes up a little before applying full brake just before passing one meter above the pontoon. With further smooth brake input I was able to land 8cm from the dead centre. My best score of the last two days and I was still dry. Eight centimetres was not too bad at all.



I looked around to see how close the next pilot was. I had time to sign for my score, and the raft crew rolled up my glider quickly before his arrival. I secretly smiled to



myself, as he scored about 5m. I was ferried back to the side of the lake and was able to enjoy a beer while watching the remaining pilots complete their final round flights. Only three failed to make the pontoon to have a final swim.

I cannot remember the last time I had been placed so far down the listing of a competition. I reminded myself why we were all there. We had been invited

to attend and prove the facilities for the 2009 World Air Games because we were the best pilots for our given disciplines. We had done our job well and highlighted what needed improving before next year's event. This had been similar to the test event for the Olympics. It was hard work with some disappointments, but overall very satisfying. It was a privilege to have participated.

I may have been the best UK pilot in the European Paragliding Accuracy Championships for the last three years, in the European Paragliding Accuracy Cup and the Paragliding Accuracy World Championships, but this event has confirmed that I definitely need to get a new glider to participate in the WAG in 2009. Perhaps there is a sponsor out there, who wants to see his company logo on a glider performing well at the World Air Games! With all the TV coverage that has been organised for just this one competition it will be fantastic value for them.