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Ballooning – Hot Air Airships

WHAT IS A HOT AIR AIRSHIP COMPETITION?

When you change the shape of a hot air balloon and add a motor with a propeller you have a hot air airship which not only uses the wind but can now move against or across the wind direction. This maneuverability adds even more precision to the competitions as now the airships can gently approach the targets at their own speed, hover over targets to throw markers, or do touch-and-go's on the targets. Hot air airships require the skills of flying a balloon as well as the ability to gently operate a large powered aircraft using the winds and terrain to maneuver to small targets or fly set courses.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO WIN?

Starting at a pre-flight briefing, the Event Director, after receiving weather information, sets out competition tasks which the pilots must complete to score points. Hot air airships amaze spectators by their color, size and manoeuvrability. Not only do they put on a show when they launch but also can fly tasks and provided the wind conditions are light, return to their point of departure. Often tasks are set to stay within viewing distance of spectators so they can see the precision touchdown tasks they fly.

Competition tasks can include precision targets, navigating slaloms or racing tasks which involve time, speed and distance. The flights start by requiring all competitors to fly through a start gate within a given time window, then flying on to complete their assigned tasks. With a number of airships in the air it is important to avoid collisions around targets. These can be dangerous and result in penalty points to the offending competitor.

HOW IS IT SCORED?

Markers (small weighted bags) may be dropped at targets, or the competitors may be asked to touch down the airship's wheel in a very small area like a children's wading pool. Distances can be measured using tapes or survey equipment. For speed or distance tasks officials will monitor the aircraft's progress making sure they follow the rules and meet the flight goals they are assigned. Tools used by officials may include flight recorders, measuring tapes, timers and direct observations of the flight.

Points are assigned for completing parts or complete tasks within given time periods. The resulting distance, times or rule infringements are sent to a scoring team for verification and final calculations. Points are awarded for good performances. Upon completion of each task the competitors' results will be ranked from highest to lowest. The best performance in each task is awarded 500 or 1000 points (depending on the task); others are then calculated sequentially, so that second place may get 900, third may be 800 and so on. The individual scores are added together to produce the overall FAI World Air Games Champion.

TELL ME MORE!

Hot Air Airships need light wind conditions for initial inflation and safe landings; consequently, competitions usually take place in the early morning or late afternoon when the winds are most gentle. Although airships have motors for power, they are still very much affected by wind conditions because of their size, although they try to make efforts to stay close to the launch area and within a few hundred feet of the ground. Therefore the competitions can be seen easily by spectators.

Hot Air Airship competitions are spectacular and exciting for spectators while being very challenging for pilots; testing their skill and judgement. The World Air Games brings the best hot air airship competitors in the world together to ride the winds to determine a champion.

« *Fierce competition in spectacular colour* »