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WHAT IS THE PARALLEL SLALOM COMPETITION?

The Helicopter Parallel Slalom is a race against time, demanding great precision by the pilot and excellent communication between him and his co-pilot. Two helicopters race simultaneously around a slalom course whilst steering an open bucket full of water through a series of gates one metre wide. Achieving this challenging task requires the pilot to manoeuvre the helicopter forwards, backwards and sideways; he can not see the bucket and has to respond to instructions from his co-pilot. If a gate is missed at the first attempt the crew may try again but all the gates should be taken in the correct order. The pressure of head to head racing must be tempered by a careful, accurate touch and calm piloting. The water bucket rope is held by the co-pilot and the bucket is suspended between 5 and 11 metres below the helicopter. Once the course is completed the bucket must be placed on a table 1 m in diameter and 1 metre high. Penalty points are applied for failing gates, placing the bucket outside a 30 cm target on the table, wrong rope handling and exceeding the time limits.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO WIN?

The winner is the competitor who completes the six gate slalom course twice within the time limit of 2 min 15 seconds and with the least number of penalties. If a competitor goes over the allotted time he receives significant time penalties up to a limit of 4 minutes after which he is disqualified. If there is a tie, the one completing the course in the fastest time is the winner.

HOW IS IT SCORED?

Once the judges have given the co-pilot the rope and the helicopters are in the start position, the race timing is started by the dropping of a flag. The timing stops when the bucket has been positioned and the co-pilot releases the rope. The on-course judges verify that the helicopter has successfully passed through all the gates and list any penalties.

TELL ME MORE!

The competition events in the World Air Games have their origins in the first World Championships for helicopters in the 1970's. The competitive tasks performed in this event emphasise the skills pilots use when engaged in SAR (search & rescue) operations. The competing pilots are from all areas of helicopter operations; commercial, private, military, search & rescue and police. Helicopter competitions are a very international affair. Major championships have been held in Germany, Great Britain, France, USSR/Russia, USA, Austria and Poland. The World Air Games events are derived from the World Championship events with some changes to help those new to watching air sports to understand the skills involved. These events were tested during a competition in Turin in 2009 but this is the first time we can see these competitive helicopter tasks performed in a world class event.

Helicopters play an increasingly important role in our society; many lives have been saved by the heroic action of helicopter pilots in all parts of the world. The development of smaller and less expensive helicopters has brought the possibility to become a helicopter pilot within the reach of many more people. Professional and helpful helicopter flying schools can be found in most countries. Most people with reasonable co-ordination and aptitude can learn to fly a helicopter, but to attain the level of skill demonstrated by the pilots competing in the FAI World Air Games takes many hours of practice and training.

« Precision and accuracy »