

Paramotoring in the UK

Annual Report to CIMA from the UK Alternate Delegate

Introduction

Paramotoring in the UK continues to gain in popularity, with an increasing number of schools and clubs across the country. There is regular coverage in the non-PPG specific magazines (Microlight Flying and Skywings) and the principal publication for paramotor pilots, Paramotor Magazine, has strong contributions from British pilots and an extensive readership in the UK.

Whilst I submit this report as the UK Alternate Delegate, I also chair the UK Paramotor Competitions Committee and have directed the National and Open Championships in the UK for the last three years.

Pilots in the UK

With no mandatory training system or registration requirements, it's not possible to give an accurate figure for the number of PPG pilots in the UK. Membership of the two main PPG internet forums are over 600 with lively and relevant correspondence.

Non-competitive Flying

The vast majority of British paramotor pilots don't compete or play any role in competitions, but there is significant non-competitive activity worthy of note:

USSR

In May 2010, the BMAA ran its second Ultralight Single Seat Rally for paramotors and sub-115kg de-regulated Microlights. Pilots met at Sywell aerodrome (site of the 2010 EMC) and set off to fly as far as possible, returning no later than 50 hours after leaving. Flights are validated using AMOD loggers and there are prizes for the longest series of flights, the furthest points reached and the longest duration of a single flight. Despite adverse weather conditions, 15 pilots achieved impressive distances in both foot-launched and sub-115kg classes. This is now sure to be a regular fixture in the BMAA calendar.

Overseas Events

Record numbers of British pilots travelled to Basse-Ham for the Mondial Paramoteur, to St Hilaire for the Coupe Icare (in the rain) and to Las Candelas. British pilots also competed in the French and Belgian National Championships.

Fly-ins

We've seen an increasing number of club and school fly-ins across the country, offering equipment trials and in some cases, simple tasks. These are helping to increase the positive exposure of the sport and bringing new and prospective pilots into contact with more experienced pilots and instructors.

Competitions

General

National competition in the UK is stronger than ever. I chair the UK Paramotor Competitions Committee, running competitions on behalf of the BMAA in the UK. Prior to 2009/10, we had a single annual National contest from which a National Champion and a provisional National Team would emerge. In this last year, we have trialled a new format with a three-leg National League and a British Open Championships. We are continuing to develop this format going into 2010/11.

The 2010 Open attracted 60 pilots, all but 2 in the PF1 class. One WF1 and one PL1 flew the same tasks as the PF1s with no need for task modification. 20 of the pilots were from overseas: France, Italy, Belgium, Estonia & Ireland. We have developed a trade presence to help finance the event and this year had nearly 20 trade stands with some doing brisk business over the four days. The budget for the event runs at about £6,000, nearly 25% of which is the site fee. We have used the same turf farm for the last two years and will use it again in 2011 as good task management and local communications have resulted in a very low level of complaints. This huge, flat, lawn site has provided us with an exceptional venue for precision tasks and set in the heart of England, also offers beautiful cross-country flying.

Rationale for new Format

As a Committee, we have several objectives including making competitions 'inclusive' to attract new pilots, but at the same time, making the competition challenging enough to prepare the National team well for international FAI competitions. To some extent, these objectives conflict, but we believe that we have largely succeeded in addressing them with this mixed format. It also serves to extend the competition season year-round to keep the top pilots current and avoid the focus on a once a year event. Also, having enjoyed welcoming overseas pilots as 'guests' for a number of years, we decided on an Open format to allow everyone to compete on an equal basis. In fact all three podium positions at this year's Open Championships were won by French pilots as was the Top Lady Pilot award.

Format

The first two legs of the League (September and April) are 2-day events with minimal infrastructure and a strong focus on flying as many tasks as conditions allow. Whilst the Task Director endeavours to complete scoring during the event, this is not allowed to be a barrier to flying. In 2009/10, 10 tasks were flown on each of these 'minor' legs. We used a version of the French positional scoring system for these events, with great success.

The final leg of the National League is also the new 'British Open Paramotor Championships', with the cumulative scores from the minor legs being converted into a single '1000-point' score to be carried forward to this final leg. Task scores at the Open count towards both the Open leader board and that for the National League. In 2010/11, we have further refined the scoring, using a refined version of the newer French positional system, such that the final accumulated scores over the two minor legs are multiplied by 10 and carried forward to the final leg. This means that if a low number of tasks are flown in the minor legs, then they have a proportional effect on the overall League scores.

We are currently continuing to use 'standard' FAI scoring for the Open/Final Leg, but are still considering the merits of moving over completely to a positional system.

Other Learning Points

Take-off/Landing decks

The Open site offers us very large decks adjacent to the camping and admin areas. Coupled with using free-launch windows, launching 60 pilots has been trouble-free and consistently achieved in less than 60 minutes. The main field has been large enough to have a single task combining a launch deck, a Japanese Slalom, a Slow/Fast task, a task involving kicking Swiss Balls and a Bowling Landing – all with 12-15 pilots in the air at the same time. To be fair, this was also achieved by very specific traffic rules, good task layout, excellent marshalling and outstanding pilot discipline. Run late on the Saturday afternoon, this task provided a real spectacle for the paying visitors with constant activity 360 degrees around the viewing area over a 2-hour period.

Economy Tasks

We continue to use two 'non-FAI' systems for economy tasks. Whilst both involve weighing, they are not linked and should be judged independently on their merits. The first is that instead of using a fixed weight or quantity of fuel (with the associated draining and quarantining procedures), pilots are weighed as they enter the deck at the start of the task and weighed as they leave the deck at the end. Obviously, marshals police the process carefully, but the effort is considerably less than the traditional system. We have modified the rules accordingly and whilst there is no doubt that task strategy is different, it can be just as challenging. The main benefit is the huge flexibility it offers the Task Director in task setting and the significant reduction in non-flying activity for the pilots.

The other system is handicapping. We've experimented over 5 years with different formulae. The original system gave a 100kg pilot a 'Bodyweight Index' of 1.00, a 75kg pilot an index of 0.75, etc. This index would be applied to fuel usage in the scoring formulae such heavier pilots are allowed proportionally more fuel to 'level the playing field'. We've varied the weighting of this adjustment and have settled on 75%, so a pilot's Bodyweight Index is based on 75% of the difference between his weight and 100kg.

There is no longer an assumption that lighter pilots will win the economy tasks, something we've become used to in international competition. This has helped with our wider objective of inclusivity.

Precision Task timing

Having experienced some problems with manual timing this year, we're now carrying out an assessment of the use of video cameras connected wirelessly to facilitate accurate, evidenced timing of stick-kicking tasks. This will also be used for the spot and bowling landings where we experienced issues over good/.bad landing technique.

Minimum Altitude

The plan to use the same site for three years running drove us to address the problem of complaints caused by low-flying. All tasks which took pilots away from the

immediate area of the airfield carried a penalty for flight below a declared minimum altitude, this being considerably easier to score than height above ground. Whilst this presented a greater workload for the scorers, the 100% penalty for anything more than spurious dips below the floor in thermic conditions was quickly taken seriously by pilots and resulted in zero substantive complaints.

No-Fly-Zones

With the same objective of complaint avoidance, I covered all airspace and any other potential risk areas with no-fly-zones. Data was collated from air charts, local knowledge and the UK hot air balloonists' database. There were a large number of NFZs, but rather than treating them as a problem, I liken them to bunkers in golf.

The main changes that will be made next year (based on experience from this year), are: (a) that NFZs close to the airfield will use ground features as boundaries rather than the standard circular zones used previously; (b) start/finish gates will be positioned well away from any NFZs; (c) the new Task Director intends to adopt a greater level of discretion regarding penalties for NFZ incursions as opposed to this year's 100% penalty for any and all incursions.

Results

The prize-winners for the British Open and League were as follows:

British Open Paramotor Championships 2010

1 st	David Muzellec (FRA)
2 nd	Alex Matheos (FRA)
3 rd	Pascal Vallée (FRA)
Top Lady Pilot:	Coralie Matheos (FRA)
Team prize:	Adventure Paramoteur (FRA)

British National Paramotor League 2010

1 st	Laura Turner
2 nd	Michel Carnet
3 rd	Phil Jennings
Best Newcomer:	Phil Jennings

Training

Foot-launched paramotor training in the UK is carried out by a small number of British Hang gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA) schools and a number of independent instructors. Paramotor trike pilots must acquire a National Private Pilot's Licence (Powered Parachute) or (Microlight) to fly legally in the UK, but it is estimated that the majority of this small fraternity still fly illegally. I qualified this year and am hoping to encourage others to complete the training and gain their licences to fly legally.

Safety

To the best of my knowledge there have been no fatal or serious accidents in the UK this year. This may be good luck or it may be down to better or more widely available training. Although some may prefer to see mandatory instructor accreditation by a single governing

body, others may argue that some instruction, even by an unaccredited instructor, is better than none at all.

Conclusion

Despite the absence of a Class 1 FAI competition year, competitive paramotoring continues to thrive in the UK. Competition is an important focus for the sport in general, driving equipment development and the sharing of knowledge and skills. With a well-established annual competition, we look forward to more pilots competing at home and further team success abroad.

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UK Alternate Delegate