How to enjoy your firs

British Team Coach Andy Davis, above, winner of two Standard Class Gold Medals at World Championships, draws on the successful team training programme and on his own experience for tips to help you

WHEN well prepared and in the right frame of mind I find competition flying really enjoyable. I can hardly wait for the daily briefing to find out what the next challenge will be. It is fantastic fun to race along with your peers on a good day and incredibly satisfying to complete a difficult task on a day when you might normally not even open the trailer doors. It is even more fun if you are performing well.

Yet it can be incredibly frustrating and demoralising if you perform badly, especially if the reasons are within your control.

In this article I intend to focus on the five main areas that experience has shown can and do affect competition performance and therefore the satisfaction you gain from flying in competitions.

These are:

Preparation – of your equipment, making sure you understand the task objectives, how to practise effectively, fitness and logistics;

Expectations and objectives – the psychology stuff, assessing what level you have reached, setting realistic goals and objectives;

Theory (just a little) – what you can easily do to consistently go faster and why;

Practice – how to effectively train for contest flying;

Execution – what to do at the competition, the main dos and don'ts.

Although this guide is intended to help those pilots new to competitive flying with both preparation for and participation in their first competition, experienced racing pilots might also find it useful revision.

Much of the content is drawn from the British Team Coaching Programme.

Preparation

To start with, it goes without saying that your equipment should be in the best possible working order. The time to sort this out is well in advance of the competition.

Wheel brake: sooner or later in a competition you are going to have to make an outlanding and the wheel brake on your glider *must* be well adjusted and effective. Nothing is going to distract you from the primary task of soaring more than worrying about its effectiveness, and how you are going to stop the glider if you land in one of those small fields below!

Drinking water: your cockpit should be comfortable and have provision for carrying a reasonable quantity of drinking water. Dehydration really affects performance, especially in a long competition, and is potentially a killer. If you regularly get headaches after flying you almost certainly don't drink enough.

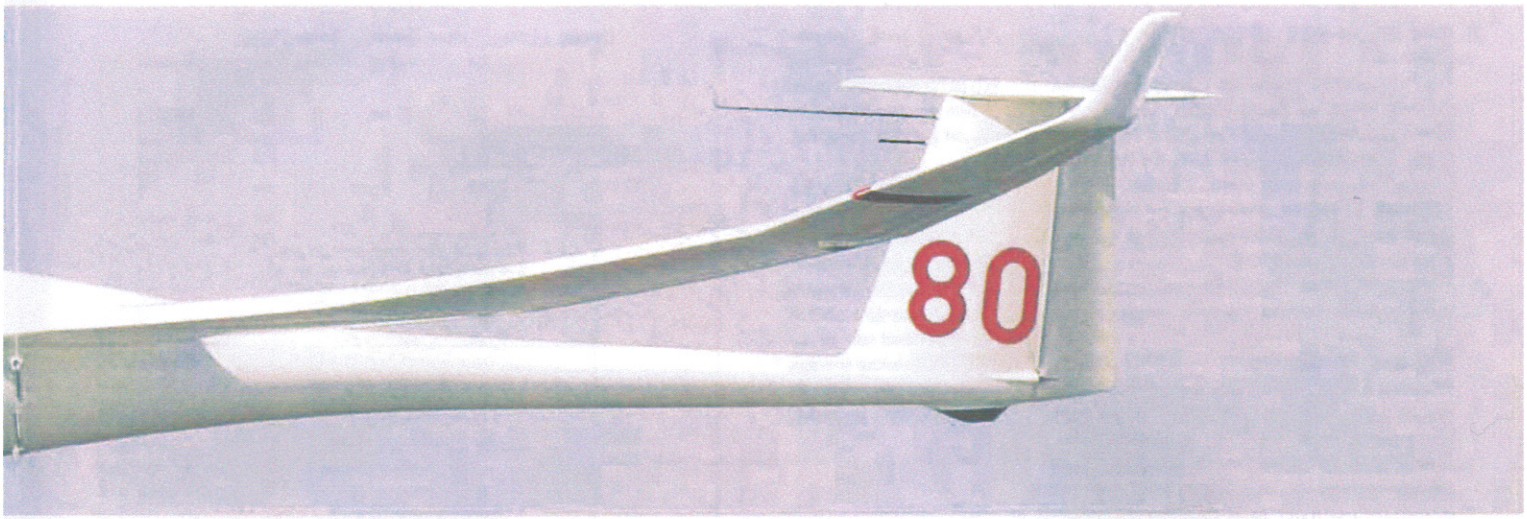
How much should you drink? As a guide, in hot weather I often drink two litres of water before flying, three litres of water on a five-hour flight and then another litre after landing.

Relief system (pee tube for us boys!): if you are drinking enough water you will eventually need to urinate. Your glider should have an easy-to-use relief system (I personally don't find plastic bags easy to use – nor does Jay Rebbeck… but that's another story). I know that it's not quite so easy for you girls, but there are answers: ask other female pilots. (Geralyn Macfadyen has a system that works well.) *Restricting fluid intake is not an option.*

Wing leading edge: most performance loss comes from damage and chips to the leading edge: fill any chips or dents with filler or gel coat and rub smooth. Then keep the wing clean throughout the competition. Consider fitting bug wipers. Used regularly in buggy weather they really do prevent a large amount of performance loss.

Instruments: having the latest gadget in the cockpit is much less important than ensuring that what you have is reliable and that you know how it works. Too many gadgets increase your workload and keep your attention inside the cockpit when you should be looking outside. The most capable computer in the cockpit is the pilot's brain and the best source of information is the pilot's eyes. A good total energy audio variometer is crucially important so that you can keep your eyes outside when joining and climbing in thermals. Your GPS

Top: Andy in Discus 2a 80, in which he won the 2003 Worlds.



st gliding competition

and logger system should have the latest turning point database, and if using an electronic airspace map make sure you use the same database as the competition scorer.

Trailer: don't forget to check your trailer to make sure it is up to the job of retrieving. Lights, brakes and tyres should all be serviceable and the trailer should hold your precious glider securely.

Understand the task objectives

The next step in preparation is to *understand the task objectives*. Read the latest edition of the competition rules (the British Gliding Association's *Competitions Handbook* is issued annually and can be downloaded from *www.gliding.co.uk*) so that you understand how to make a valid start, turning point and finish. More importantly, understand the objectives of the two types of task:

Fixed-course task: this is the classic race around turning points set by the task setter. The pilot who finishes in the shortest time wins and the others receive a proportion of the winner's points, depending on their relative speed. *You must aim to finish* because there are very few points for outlanding unless a lot of other pilots also fail to finish.

Assigned Area Task (AAT): arguably the most misunderstood task by competitors and task-setters alike. The task-setter defines the assigned areas and assigned time for the task. The pilot then chooses his own turning point in each of the assigned areas (in the right order) with the objective of going as fast as possible and finishing *after* the assigned time has elapsed. There is no penalty for flying after the assigned task time; indeed, if conditions are improving it might pay to fly further and increase your average speed. It is important to plan to go far enough so that you don't finish inside the assigned time. Your actual turning point doesn't have to be a defined point; the scoring system works out the point in space that gives the best geometry to maximise your distance. It is also important to remember that meandering around inside the assigned areas in an unplanned way isn't adding to your distance and hence speed. A good way to keep focused on racing is to choose a "target TP" inside the assigned area, set it in your GPS and race towards it.

When flying an AAT your priorities, in order, should be:

1. *You must finish.* The task is a race and outlanders don't receive many points.
2. *You should not finish early.* Only consider finishing early if by doing so you can avoid almost certain outlanding. You should go far enough in each assigned area to make sure you don't finish early. This is because your finishing speed is calculated by dividing your marking distance by your actual task time or the assigned time – *whichever is greater.*

Although most points are lost by outlanding, the next best way to lose points is by finishing early.

As an example, on a 4-hour AAT, pilot A flies 300km and finishes in 4 hours. His finishing speed is 75km/h. Pilot B is much faster and flies 300km in 3 hours 45 minutes. His actual speed is 80km/h, but because he finished in less than 4 hours his finishing speed for scoring purposes is his marking distance, 300km, divided by the task time, 4 hours. This also comes out at 75km/h, so he receives the same points as the slower pilot, A. If he had just flown a bit further in any of the sectors in order to make sure he finished after 4 hours he would have scored nearly 20 per cent more speed points than pilot A.

A good rule of thumb is to plan to be starting final glide as the assigned time elapses.

ds. Above: ensure your kit works before the comp – you don't want leaking dump valves on the day! (www.whiteplanes.com)

How to practise effectively

Even when your equipment is in order and you know what you'll be trying to achieve, you still need to practise effectively. Every flight you make should be like a competitive flight. Set a task, make a start, fly the task if at all possible and make a finish.

Simply flying cross-country by following good patches of weather around is not good practice for competition.

If possible, use the glider and equipment you intend to use for the competition.

Physical fitness

Physical fitness is another key element of preparation. Gliding competitions are very demanding, both mentally and physically. Many hours of task flying over several days require high levels of stamina. It is impossible to remain mentally alert for long periods without first attaining a reasonable level of physical fitness. Anything you can do to improve your physical fitness will improve your performance and enjoyment. *(See below for psychological preparation.)*

Logistics

You also need to sort out logistics well in advance. Once you have identified your crew and made sure they know the dates they are needed, agree defined roles and responsibilities for yourself and for them. Will you trust the crew to rig the glider? Connect the controls? Fill up with water-ballast? Clear logger memories? Load the tasks into the GPS? Clearly there are no hard and fast rules, but what is important is that you define what you expect the crew to do and what you will do.

I personally always take responsibility for items that have critical safety implications or flight recording function. I always rig the wings, tailplane, connect the controls and DI the glider, clear logger memories, install the loggers and load tasks into the GPS.

Try to get everything (glider, caravan, tent, crew) to the competition site early so that you can check in with the organisation in good time. Settle yourself in and establish a daily routine that allows you to relax.

Expectations and objectives

Only after honestly appraising your level of progress can you establish some realistic expectations for the competition.

Assess your own abilities: try to consider objectively what level your flying has reached. How experienced are you? How have your skills developed? What have you achieved so far: Silver, Gold, 300km, 500km? Do you have any other competition experience, task weeks or Inter-club League? How did you perform relative to the other pilots? Are you able to compare your flying with that of other experienced competition pilots? How well has your practice for the competition been going?

Realistic expectations: you should try to establish some realistic expectations and objectives prior to entering the competition. For example, if you have previously flown a 300km flight, a realistic expectation is to successfully fly a 300km task with the objective of going faster than you have previously achieved, or perhaps completing a 500km task if the weather is good.

It is important to note that the emphasis is on flying objectives and not on the result. One of the ways to very effectively inhibit your performance is to set unrealistic objectives that focus on the result.

For example, if your objective is to place in the top five, failure to achieve that result destroys your enjoyment of the competition and the resulting stress will further affect your performance.

The psychology of competing

Flying a glider cross-country requires complex mental processing of vast amounts of information.

We **see**, **hear**, and **feel** information, which we need to be able to **observe**, **process**, and **compare** with our database (our mental library of our experience), **decide** what to do, **instruct** our hands and feet on the controls and **review** our decision to see if it was correct, while at the same time continuing to observe and process new information as it comes in.

The pilot is best able to carry out these complex mental processes when relaxed. As stress levels rise, the individual's capacity to carry out these complex processes is greatly reduced. Decisions start to become irrational rather than instinctive.

The perfect state of mind is relaxed and alert with decisions being made almost instinctively.

All sorts of mental **baggage** can raise your stress levels, and – by cutting across your ability to process information – this can significantly lower your performance levels.

There isn't a lot we can do about some of the baggage we carry around such as our jobs, relationships, financial worries, and so on, although we can help by not starting any new projects just before the competition begins. There is, however, a huge amount we can do about gliding and competition-related baggage.

Start by preparing properly for the contest so that you are content with your equipment and training. Establish realistic expectations and objectives for the competition.

Many pilots find a regular daily routine at the competition helps them to relax.

Use other competitors for information, but don't allow yourself to worry about what they are doing or have done. If somebody has caught you up having started later, it's just history, there's nothing you can do to change that history.

Most definitely don't try to do something different to get away from them, it's a certain a recipe for disaster.

Don't waste time and energy complaining that the task is too difficult/easy/set in the wrong direction (delete as appropriate). It's the same task for everybody.

It's noticeable that those pilots who spend most time complaining often do the worst in competitions; they are just stressing themselves into performing badly.

If you get low, lose time or suffer any other disappointment, you can force yourself to relax by concentrating on soaring aspects of the flight, for example, where you will find the next good climb, which street to follow and so forth.

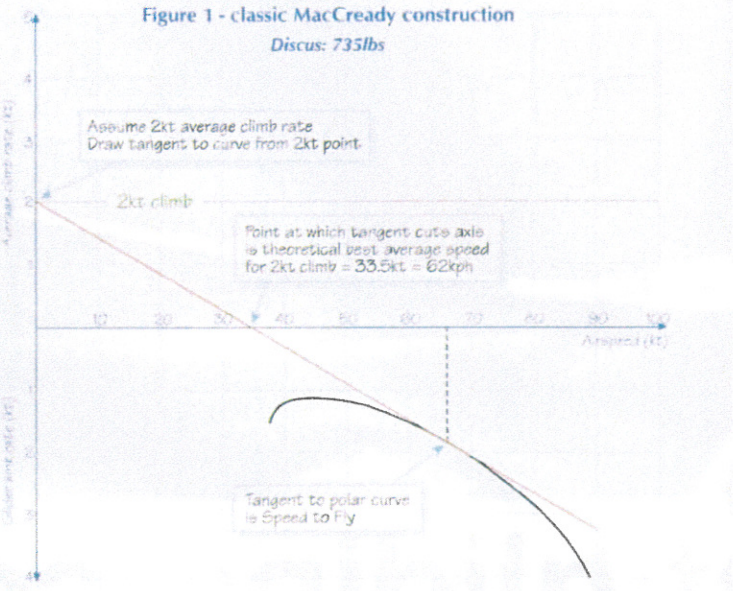
Focusing on the result is bad for your mental health. Emphasise flying objectives and ambitions. Try to relax and to fly instinctively whilst avoiding irrational decisions. Above all else **aim to have fun**.

A little theory

This section will give guidance on how fast to fly and explains how you might consistently go a little faster by flying a little slower. By giving an appreciation of achievable average speeds, it will also help to guide you on what your task start time should be.

Figure 1, right, illustrates the polar curve for an unballasted Discus with the construction for 2kt average climb rate.

By repeating this construction for various climb rates using your own glider's polar curve, it is possible for you to draw up a table of average climb rate versus theoretical average cross-country speed, as in Table 1 (opposite)



(Steve Longland)

Table 1

Theoretical average cross country speed Discus, 735lbs

Average climb rate (kts)	Best Speed to Fly (kts)	Theoretical average XC speed (km/h)
0	52 (best L/D speed)	0
1	56	44
2	67	62
3	75	77
4	80	87
5	81	94
6	82	101

MacCready Theory

The classic MacCready construction is used with the glider's polar curve to determine the theoretical optimum speed to fly and average cross-country speed for a range of climb rates *(see* Figure 1, *left).*

Tangents to the polar curve are drawn from average climb rate values on the vertical axis. The point at which the tangent touches the curve is the theoretical optimum speed to fly, and the point at which the tangent cuts the horizontal axis is the theoretical average speed for that climb rate.

Figure 1 illustrates the polar curve for an unballasted Discus with the construction for 2kt average climb rate. By repeating this construction for various climb rates using your own glider's polar curve, it is possible to draw up a table of average climb rate versus theoretical average cross-country speed, as in Table 1, above (again, the example is for an unballasted Discus).

Electronic flight computers basically do the same sum when computing the speed to fly and in still air would direct the pilot to fly at the quoted best speed for any given MacCready setting. Increasing the wing-loading by the addition of waterballast has the effect of increasing the speeds by approximately the square root of the weight increase, so adding 200lbs of water to the Discus increases quoted speeds by about 10 per cent (it's interesting to note that with the Discus at plausible UK climb rates it's almost never worth flying faster than 80kt unballasted). Classic MacCready theory demands that the MacCready is set to the anticipated average climb rate in the next thermal to give the optimum speed to fly towards that thermal. There are also several practical considerations to bear in mind when setting the MacCready.

How fast to fly

A common mistake amongst inexperienced competition pilots is to fly too fast by setting too high a MacCready setting. One reason is over-estimating climb rates.

Consider a typical British day, on which our pilot arrives under a promising-looking cloud, feels a good surge of lift and spends 3 turns, say 1 minute, getting centred and climbing 100ft in the process. Once centred, he climbs for 2 minutes at a settled average of 4kt, 800ft. His total climb so far is 900ft in 3 minutes. The lift then dies off as he approaches cloudbase. He spends another 3 turns (1 minute) climbing a further 100ft trying to recentre the lift before deciding that he has wasted enough time and leaves the thermal. Total height gain is 1,000ft in 4 minutes, so ***the actual average climb rate from entering to leaving the lift is only 2.5kt even though the averager settled at 4kt.***

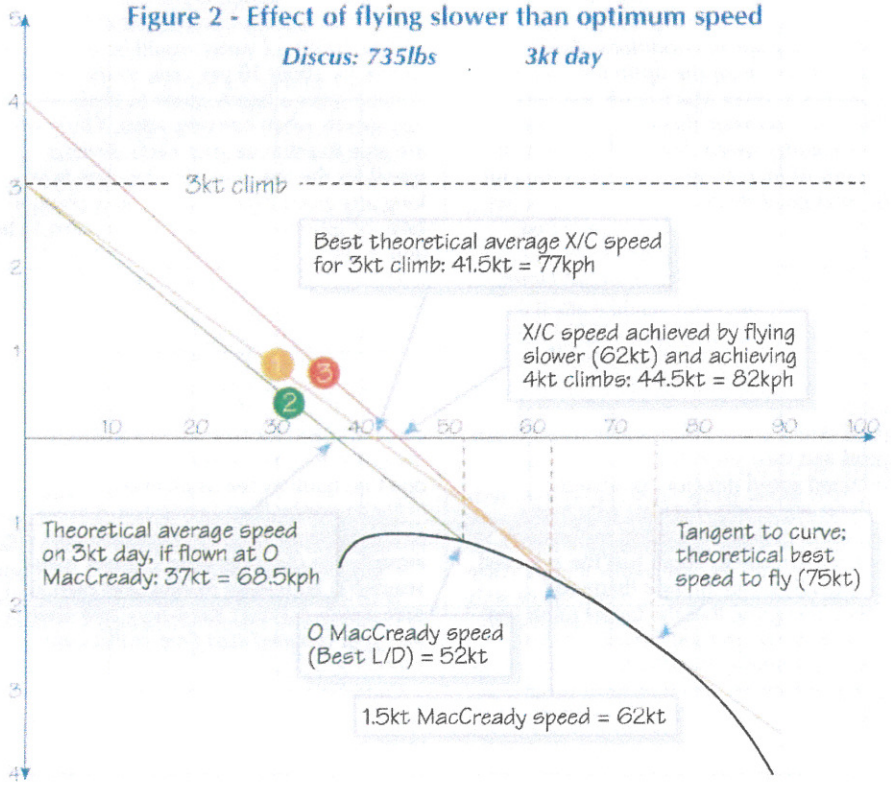


Figure 2: in typical UK conditions, flying a little slower by setting a lower MacCready has little effect on theoretical average cross-country speed but it does increase your search area for the next good thermal (Steve Longland)

The achieved climb rate from entering to leaving the thermal will depend very much on how quickly the pilot centres, how decisive he is about leaving as the thermal dies at the top and how deep the operating depth is, but the important point to note is that the actual average climb rate will always be rather less than that indicated by the typical 20-30 second averager found in most variometer systems. It is very easy to over-estimate the average climb rate.

Now consider the effect of flying a little slower than the optimum speed between thermals.

Figure 2 *(above)* illustrates the effect of flying between thermals on an average British 3kt thermal day at best L/D speed instead of the theoretical optimum inter-thermal speed. Theoretical optimum is shown by yellow line 1, tangent to the polar curve from the 3kt point. However, if the glider is flown between thermals at the zero MacCready speed (best L/D) of 52kt, the theoretical cross-country speed in this case is the point where the green line 2 from the 3kt climb point to the polar curve at 52kt crosses the horizontal axis. Incredibly, the theoretical cross-country speed is only 8.5km/h less, a reduction from optimum of just 11 per cent, but with the advantage of achieving a glide angle of 43:1 instead of the 32:1 achieved at 75kt – a 34 per cent improvement in glide angle and therefore search area for the next thermal.

Not only does flying slower significantly reduce your chances of an outlanding or time-consuming low scrape, but by increasing your search area significantly, also increases your chances of finding a better-than-average thermal.

Clearly as speed flown between thermals moves closer to the theoretical optimum, the average speed increases until there comes a point where there is very little difference in average speed, but still remains a significant improvement in glide angle. The theoretical optimum inter-thermal speed for a 1.5kt MacCready setting is 62kt, giving a glide angle of 39:1. If this 1.5kt MacCready speed of 62kt is flown on a 3kt day, the actual average speed will be 74km/h. This is just four per cent less than the optimum, but with 22 per cent better glide angle and search area.

If this 22 per cent better search area yields a thermal just 1kt stronger at 4kt, the average cross-country speed will now increase to 82km/h, as illustrated by the red line 3. This is six per cent quicker than that achieved by flying strictly at theoretical optimum cross-country speed and climbing at 3kt. This assumes that the pilot actually does find a stronger climb as a result of flying a bit slower with a much bigger

search area, but it nicely illustrates a fundamental point. ***In typical UK and Northern European conditions, flying a little slower than the optimum speed by setting a lower MacCready has very little effect on your theoretical average cross-country speed, but has huge benefit in terms of increasing your search area for the next good thermal.*** If you find a better thermal as a result, your average speed will almost certainly be higher.

Note that these examples are all *target* speeds. Once the MacCready is set at a given value, it is very important to follow the speed director commands, especially if it tells you to fly faster when in sink. I don't personally chase every little twitch of the speed director, but generally fly at the target speed and then smoothly vary the speed for sustained speed director commands.

These arguments illustrate why many successful competition pilots instinctively set their MacCready to about half the achieved average climb rate in their thermals.

They recognise that the fastest pilots find the best climbs and are optimising their chances of finding those better climbs without sacrificing too much of their theoretical cross-country speed. Combine this with the tendency to over-estimate our achieved average climb rate, and the argument to fly a little slower becomes even more compelling. Furthermore, since a low scrape can be very time consuming and a premature outlanding a total points disaster, there is a major tactical imperative to fly a little slower to improve our search area and avoid getting low.

When should I start?

First you have to know how fast you are likely to go. Once again we go back to basic MacCready theory. Using the construction shown in figure 1 draw up a table of optimum cross-country speeds for various climb rates and then reduce the values by say 10 per cent to allow for route deviations, navigational errors, etc, as illustrated by Table 2 *(below)* for an unballasted Discus.

This table now becomes your reference against which you can estimate your likely average speed for the day, having received the daily met briefing with its forecast of predicted thermal strengths. As mentioned previously, cross-country speeds will approximately increase by the square root of any weight increase (not exactly, because amongst other things, climb rates will be worse with waterballast). The effect of adding 200lbs of water would be to increase speeds by about 10 per cent, so the middle column gives a handy guide to likely average speeds when carrying water. Once you are able to estimate your likely average speed for the day, you can calculate how long any given fixed course task is going to take, or estimate how far you are going to be able to fly in the assigned time in an AAT.

Table 2

Likely average cross country speed Discus, 735lbs

Average climb rate (kts)	Theoretical average XC speed (kts)	Likely average XC speed (km/h)
0	0	0
1	44	40
2	62	56
3	77	70
4	87	78
5	94	84
6	101	91

Having calculated how long your task is likely to take you, consider your start time options by working back from the desired finish time. The met forecast will give a clue when the soaring day is going to fade. Plan to fly your task in the strongest part of the day, but leave yourself a bit of soaring margin at the end of the day in case you don't go quite as fast as planned.

For example, if you anticipate 4 hours to complete the task and good thermals are expected to die away after 5.30pm, allow yourself a 30-minute margin, and plan a 5pm finish. Subtract the 4-hour task time and your planned start time in this case should be 1pm.

Consider practical factors that might affect your planned start time and adjust your plans accordingly. If significant shower activity is forecast, consider starting as early as possible to complete the task before showers become widespread. If there is likely to be a large amount of spreadout, consider if this might slow you down and adjust your start time to suit. In blue weather, thermals often peak later in the afternoon than when clouds are present and it is often beneficial to start a bit later (additionally, if you start early, you have no other gliders ahead to mark thermals and later starters are going to use you as their thermal marker). Some sites may have particular local factors that influence your decision – for example incoming sea air in the late afternoon, which makes an early finish advisable.

The aim is to always take off with an optimum start time for the day in mind.

Practice

The skills, judgment and stamina required to participate successfully in a competition cannot be gained without practice or training. Every flight you make should, if possible, simulate a competition flight.

Fly cross-country at every opportunity

Fly cross-country tasks as much as possible, ideally in the glider you will use for the competition. If the weather is soarable but will not allow you to fly cross-country, practise important flight activities, for example, thermal location and centring by climbing a bit, airbrake down, centre again. Practise choosing fields and later visit them on the ground to give yourself feedback and build confidence in your judgment.

Set yourself tasks

Try to set yourself a task every time you fly. Following patches of good weather around the countryside at random will not train you to fly a competition task in which you are required to fly to given turning points or assigned areas. If possible, also practise flying AATs.

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Fly cross-country tasks at every opportunity...

If your glider carries water and you intend to use it in the competition, fly with water, building up the weight over a series of flights so you learn what is a comfortable weight for given conditions.

Set yourself a task before take-off, plan it properly and work out a start time.

Use the time between take-off and your start to relax, practise thermal location and centring (note where the thermals lie in relation to the clouds).

Starting efficiently is quite an art, so make a proper start from a BGA start sector and then, weather permitting, make a determined effort to complete the whole task as set.

Don't give up unless the task clearly becomes impossible. It is very important to learn to stay airborne and keep going in difficult weather. In this way, build up your stamina and develop mental toughness.

Make a proper finish across a finish line or ring to gain familiarity with your final glide computer and to learn the planning and safety issues involved in low-energy arrivals before your first competition day.

Analyse each flight

Look back on each flight. If any other pilots flew the same task, discuss the flight with them. Ask yourself a series of questions:

- Was the start time right?
- What went well?
- Why did it go well?
- What went badly?
- Could it have been avoided and how?
- Did I follow the best route?
- Was I ruthless about the climb rates?
- Too much, too little, about right?
- Did I find the best lift?
- Did I identify the right clouds?
- Where was the best lift in relation to them?
- Could I have centred quicker?
- Was my final glide about right?
- Was it too fast, too low?

Be honest with yourself, but don't worry about errors and mistakes you couldn't possibly have anticipated in advance.

If you identify any particular weaknesses in your flying, then concentrate on those weaknesses in your future practice.

Execution

At the competition it is essential to stay relaxed, focused and avoid distractions. Don't increase your mental baggage by complaining about the task-setting or by worrying about what the other competitors have done or are doing – it's all just history.

You can't change history but you can influence your future.

Remain focused by following your daily routine and concentrating on soaring aspects of your own flight such as where the next climb is, which cloud street to follow and so on.

Think ahead, run and review two plans simultaneously in your head: a short-term and a long-term plan.

The short-term plan might be to find and centre a climb under the next cloud. The long-term plan might be to consider options after you have climbed, what it looks like ahead, which way to route and how high to climb to reach the next good weather.

Obviously, one plan takes priority over the other from time to time. They are both interdependent and constantly changing – there is no point in having a long-term plan to glide 20km across to the next cloud street if the short-term plan can't get you high enough to get there!

Remain flexible throughout the flight. Be ready to change your plans if required. Look well ahead to see if there are any weather developments that might affect your planned route. Be prepared to slow down to conserve your height at the first sign of a major problem. Conversely, be ready to speed up again as soon as you can see good weather within range ahead.

Starting

Prior to your start, watch on track to see if there is any sign of weather deterioration. Look well upwind to see if there is any sign of high cirrus rushing in that could dilute the sun and weaken thermals. Unexpected spreadout, showers, high cloud or blue conditions are all good reasons to adjust your planned start time.

Don't worry about what other competitors are doing – treat them as another source of information you can use to your advantage. For example, if they are all starting early, ask yourself why. There might be something you haven't noticed, but if you can't see a logical reason, ignore them and stick with your original plan.

Resist the almost overwhelming urge to set off the very moment the start opens. Try to relax and focus on soaring issues. Sample as many clouds as possible to learn where the lift lies in relation to the clouds.

If conditions are reliable, move a little distance away from the start area, where there are fewer gaggles and gliders to worry about. I find that munching on a sandwich helps me to relax.

On task

On task, take what you perceive to be the best route and climb in the best thermals you find. Fly at a comfortable speed that allows you to reach the next good-looking cloud at a reasonable height. Always try to fly so that if your intended cloud doesn't work you have enough height to reach another cloud high enough to give you a good chance of climbing away.

Don't be tempted to fly fast just because the others are. The actual speed you fly at doesn't matter very much; the fastest pilots use the strongest climbs and centre quickest. Again, don't worry about what the other competitors are doing, but use them to your advantage. If they are climbing ahead on your route, sample their thermal and make your own mind up. If it's good, climb, but if it's not, leave it. If you hit a good climb on the way to the gaggle, stop and climb in it.

Similarly with route: it's very easy to blindly follow other gliders. If they are going your chosen way, follow them. If not, ask yourself why and if you can see no good reason, go your own way.

Remain alert for weather changes ahead. If it is deteriorating or you cannot see sun ahead, slow down to best glide speed immediately. If you do then happen to find a good climb this precaution won't affect your average speed very much. Conserve your altitude so that when you do eventually break out of the poor weather and see good conditions, you have enough height to reach them.

If conditions become really bad, do be prepared to do anything necessary to stay in the air. Turn 90° to track, or in extreme situations turn through 180° back to your last climb. If you cannot see any prospect of another climb, stop in the first weak lift you find while still at a reasonable altitude rather than continuing onwards to scratch at low level. The reason for this is that if a soarable patch of sky opens up a short distance away you will have the height to reach it.

If all else fails, look on your map for a ridge facing into wind and consider ridge-soaring there to wait for an improvement.

Equally, when you suddenly break out into good weather, force yourself to increase speed again.

Final glide

If you remain focused, concentrate on flying your own glider, don't worry about what the others are doing and maintain both a short- and long-term plan, you will eventually reach a point where you are able to final glide to the finish.

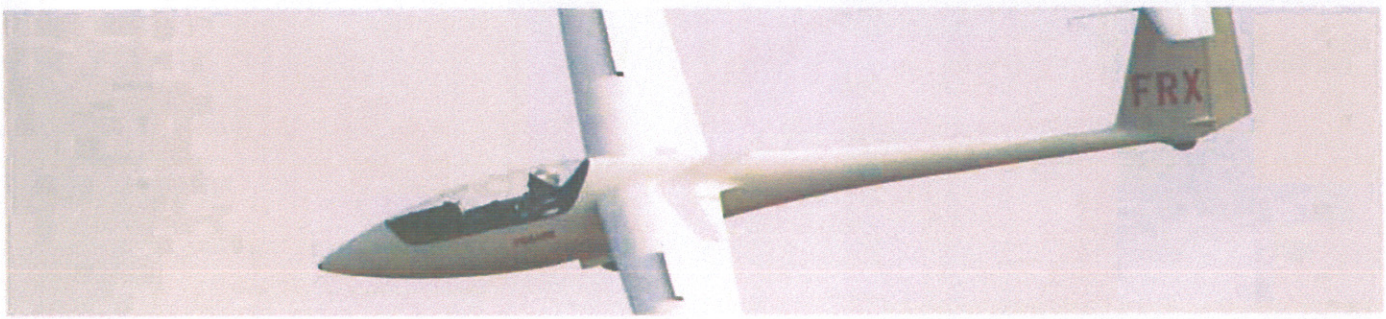
This is probably the end of a long and tiring flight and there is no point at all in making it more stressful than necessary.

If you have a height margin, try to conserve it until you are close to the finish rather than burning it off early and finding you have no margin at all for the last few kilometres. Overall, it costs almost no time to climb a bit higher in the last thermal and then regain most of the time spent climbing by converting the extra height into speed as you approach the finish.

To land out just short of the finish is very costly in points, and a hasty field selection at low level is very dangerous. Think well ahead and plan your arrival long before crossing the finish. Decide if your energy will allow you to fly a circuit or if you must land ahead.

Keep monitoring your height and speed as you close on the finish and decide if you need to change your plan. If in doubt, the safest option is always to cross the finish, open the brakes and land straight ahead.

I hope you find this guide to surviving your first competition useful, and if you are a more experienced competition pilot, perhaps it served as a useful revision. Good luck, relax, enjoy it and remember that at the end of the day it is only a game, so aim to **have fun**.



Keep monitoring speed and height on final glide: if in doubt, the safest option is always to cross the finish, open the brakes and land straight ahead (www.whiteplanes.com)