



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

The 34th FAI World Gliding Championships in Australia ends on a high

Benalla, Australia, 23 January 2017 - Hard two-week battle in Australian skies sees three new FAI Gliding World Champions win gold.

Three new FAI Gliding World Champions were crowned in Australia on Sunday 22 January 2017 – bringing to a close a hard-fought two-week long competition in Australia.

Russell Cheetham from Great Britain took gold in the Open Class, scraping ahead of defending FAI World Champion Michael Sommer (GER) by a mere 13 points out of a total of 6,562. Cheetham's teammate, Andrew Davis (GBR), took home the bronze in third position.

France's Killian Walbrou took gold in the hotly contested 18 Metre Class. The class refers to the wingspan. The young pilot beat Germany's Mario Kiessling and Great Britain's Mike Young into silver and bronze positions respectively.

And finally, gliding legend Sebastian Kawa from Poland secured yet another FAI Gliding World Championship gold medal, with a comprehensive win in the 15 Metre Class. He beat Japan's Makoto Ishikawa and Poland's Lukas Grabowski into second and third.

Posting on social media after his win Kawa said: "Woohoo! We made it. Gold for me in 15m. I'm so happy." Kawa now has eight FAI World Championship gold medals across different classes and is the most successful competition glider pilot in history.

Open Class winner Russell Cheetham said: "It's my first FAI World Championship medal of any colour, so I am unbelievably pleased."

Cheetham was flying alongside teammate Andrew Davis, who finished third in Open Class. "When we come to these events we come together and fly as a team," Cheetham explained. "This is our second championship flying together and the result proves that it works."

He added: "It's a pity that Andy [Davis] couldn't hold onto his silver medal yesterday, but it wasn't to be."

Davis, who has two FAI Gliding World Championship gold medals to his name, said his teammate had earned his win: "This week Russ was flying brilliantly, he thoroughly deserves it."

Held in Australia over two weeks, the 34th FAI World Gliding Championships suffered from some poor weather, which meant only six tasks were completed, out of a possible 11. Conditions in the sky on the taskable days were dominated by blue skies and lack of clouds – creating difficult and at times tight flying conditions.

However, the competition was a closely-fought battle and attracted a high number of pilots. Some 116 pilots from 27 countries traveled to the small town of Benalla in rural Victoria to take part in the competition, which ran from 8-22 January 2017.

The winner of the 18 Metre Class, Killian Walbrou, said the competition had been "really, really tricky."

In gliding competitions pilots take off and fly around a different course every day. They must tag certain turnpoints, before returning to HQ. Each task is several hundred kilometres long and takes

several hours to compete. The fastest around the course wins. Gliders do not use engines or propellers, relying instead on thermals - columns of rising air - to gain altitude before gliding on.

Walbrou explained: "We had a lot of blue weather, blue thermals. A lot of fliers [and] many gliders. I didn't have specific tactics, I just flew with Eric Bernard, the other French pilot. If I won it's also because of him, I didn't fly alone."

Walbrou dedicated his win to his two-year-old daughter who has been in hospital recently. "I fight for her," he said after his win.

In the Team results, Great Britain took home the gold, with France and Germany in second and third on the podium.

A full list of results, more news and day reports are on the competition website at www.wgc2017.com.

Final Results

Open Class

- 1 Russell Cheetham (GBR)
- 2 Michael Sommer (GER)
- 3 Andrew Davis (GBR)

18 Metre Class

- 1 Killian Walbrou (FRA)
- 2 Mario Kiessling (GER)
- 3 Mike Young (GBR)

15 Metre Class

- 1 Sebastian Kawa (POL)
- 2 Makoto Ichikawa (JPN)
- 3 Lukasz Grabowski (POL)

Team Cup

- 1 United Kingdom
- 2 France
- 3 Germany

Notes to editors

Winner Pictures: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskTb4Rt4>

More pictures on the Facebook Competition Account: <https://www.facebook.com/WGCBenalla/>

About FAI

FAI, the World Air Sports Federation (www.fai.org), is the world governing body for air sports and for certifying world aviation and space records. The FAI was founded in 1905 and is a non-governmental and non-profit-making organisation recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

FAI activities include Aerobatics, Aeromodelling, Airships, Amateur-Built and Experimental Aircraft, Balloons, Gliding, Hang Gliding, Helicopters, Manpowered Flying, Microlights, Parachuting, Paragliding, Paramotors, Power Flying and all other Aeronautic and Astronautic sporting activities.

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