

Post WMC 2005 – Report with recommendations for the future of Paramotor classes in competition

Prepared by Mike Campbell-Jones - dated 9-9-05

Introduction

In this report I would like to outline certain fundamental problems, which me and my team encountered whilst directing the WMC 2005, at Levroux in France this August and also at the ill fated EMC 2004 at Castillo Branco in Portugal year before.

It is a fact that the paramotor classes are developing at an astonishing rate. The WMC 2005 had the highest number of competitors ever directed in this type of competition, with nearly two times the number of aircraft attending than the classic classes.

In addition there are new, new classes shortly to be appearing, PF x2 will surely be developed before the next WMC.

Others issues looming are litigation and responsibility levels of directors and their teams.

It is perhaps now the time that CIMA and the FAI, should address certain issues quickly and with great flexibility, in order to accommodate this growth.

This would help preserve FAI competitions for the new paramotor classes and continue to develop this popular area of aviation in a positive manner, for the benefit of all concerned

Through my recent experiences, I would like to offer some positive solutions, which may assist. CIMA and the FAI in this task.

However firstly I would like to outline some of problems ahead in more detail

Paramotoring classes

As described above this area of aviation is expanding rapidly. Every year we are seeing new developments in the equipment, the pilots, their levels of skill and team work. All this is very positive for the future.

However as recognised from the EMC2004, there are now marked differences in the requirements of the paramotor classes as compared with the more classical classes. Namely because of the width of the flight envelopes, the launching techniques, the type of tasks possible (particularly the precision aspects), The use of the ground and air space, right through to the nature and age group of the pilots themselves.

Directors responsibility

At present the new classes have reached a level of size that is rapidly becoming too big to rest on the shoulders of one person, quite apart from the organisational work load it has now become a too big a responsibility.

Example:- Organising a task, with 100+ pilots in 3 different classes with 20+ marshals, each handling different aspects of the differing tasks, all to operate within a narrow weather window, because of the pressures brought about the slow airspeeds and the need to have a certain number of tasks to validate the championship, all this at 6am in the morning in a muddy field. Then repeat process over 6 days 2-3 times a day. – Hope you see the point.

Quite apart from finding directors who are prepared to do this task, there is the added problem of litigation raising its ugly head.

Only just recently a director of a European paragliding competition, was sued by the family of a competitor who died during one of the tasks. Because the window in which he set the task was said to be too narrow for the weather conditions. He was fined over 100,000 euros.

It no longer appears to make too much difference if it is pilot's choice or not to take off in first place.

Would CIMA or the FAI cover its directors in similar circumstances?

(It is perhaps interesting to look at the jury decision for the cancellation of task 4 in the WMC2004)

All the above seems very negative, however I am simply trying to draw your attention to a problem, a problem that needs addressing urgently.

Recommendations

I have talked at length with team leaders, pilots and marshals and persons involved in the sport, to come up with the following suggestions.

- 1) To divide the competition structure into 2 sections. Section 1 Economy and navigation with small amount of precision (ECO/NAV). Section 2 Precision and freestyle. (PRECISION-FREESTYLE or PRE/STYLE).

a) Section 1 ECO/NAV This entire part of the competition could be run using Richards Meredith-Hardy's new catalogue system. (See the UK nationals this year) It is much more efficient as far as numbers of marshals required, management, scoring and location is concerned. But most importantly it removes a huge amount of responsibility from the director's shoulders and makes the competition safer, even if the pilot numbers or classes increase. It offers pilots several days' choice as to when they do any particular task. So the responsibility of a take off window rests firmly on their shoulders. It also allows for some interesting team tactics.

b) Section 2 PRE/STYLE this part of the competition could be run in a relatively confined space, at a more public location, with fast moving precision tasks like slaloms, timed ascents, descents, precision take offs and landings, gate or eco-pylon flying, multi tasks. This could be started with a long-term view, aimed at the development of new exciting precision type tasks, like team relay tasks, balloon and banner chasing, laser gun scoring, object displacement Etc. Then add to this, freestyle tasks, which involve a panel of judges giving scores for form, either for team or individual choreography, perhaps done to music to keep it safer and more structured. Basically, this section of the competition could focus on spectator friendly tasks. This would help greatly with sponsorship of the events and the individual teams.

Organising this type competition would be a different affair to section 1; It could be a different director, It would require more marshals, but could be run over a shorter period of time perhaps only 2-3 days. The course would need setting by an experienced team, the scoring would have to be more immediate, the loggers could be used if set to 1 second during tasks, with filming, for verification. Because the tasks are relatively short it is much easier for a director to control the flow of pilots into the air relative to the conditions. So as far as the take off windows are concerned, the director and/or the organisation can decide to open or close windows quickly, by using safety semaphores as in track events etc. Team leaders could also participate initially by forming part of the course setting or even in Judging of teams.

It is a fact that many pilots from the paramotor classes already participate in this type of flying in other words it is already in the nature of paramotor flying and it seems to be what pilots want more of.

Also the paramotor classes and its proven safety record is the only area where this type of aviation could take place in relative safety for its pilots and public.

And it is the only type of Aviation where the public can get to see pilots in action close enough to take a real interest.

A good comparison is the following.

It is interesting to look at some of the other sports i.e. Motorcycling, where you have Enduro which happens away from the public over a very long course over a long time, and Free-style which happens in a stadium with many spectators over a very short time with live scoring on a big screen.

One possibility is that section 1 could also have the flexibility to be run as either an entirely separate competition, at a different time at a different location, or even with different team members. Or it could be run along side section 2 and vice-versa.

Recommendations continued

- 2) That Section 10 is expanded to take into account free style type tasks – so be given the option to Judge form.
- 3) That a working CIMA/FAI committee be set up to prepare a document of proposals for changes to the Paramotor class structure and that a time limit of 3 months. Be put on this, so that possible that changes could be put in place before the next European or World championships.
- 4) That this working committee are given some special concessions allowing them the fast track proposals for section 10 changes in a shorter time period than is currently available. That if necessary an agreement is reached between CIMA members to allow this to happen.

Any changes, especially fast ones are always a bit stressful for any organization, however this in this case I strongly believe, that it would seem to be an Ideal time for CIMA and the FAI to bring them about.

This is mainly because, one of the more positive aspects born out events at the EMC2204, was that the Paramotor (PPG) classes now have the new roll to manage their own competitions the near future, i.e. with regard to choosing the location and the management of entrance fees etc.

So there is already in place a Paramotor classes sub committee, already formed and ready to act.

Finally if changes are not made, who will run the next event with the 200+ pilots from the extra 10 countries, and how will its directors/organisation manage.

The really exciting aspect of all this, is that if handled properly the paramotor classes, are sure to bring aviation much closer to the general public, with that comes better media coverage of events, so therefore sponsorship and technical development. This will also undoubtedly create a healthy pool of new pilots and a general renewed interest in our sport, AVIATION.

Yours sincerely

Mike Campbell-Jones

Competition director of WMC2005 France & EMC2004 - Portugal
For Paramotor (PPG) new classes at