

## **THE 1996 WORLD MICROLIGHT CHAMPIONSHIPS**

### **A Powered Paragliding Perspective**

Having written a very lengthy editorial covering the adventure of our National Champs in April this year, I have been placed in a state of confusion by a request that I write an account of the Worlds, but under extremely strict orders that I keep it short. Being someone who has difficulty in accomplishing the complex task of walking and chewing gum at the same time, I can't understand why I've been put under pressure to produce an article, but it must be very short. Do they want it or not? If someone can explain this contradiction (with the help of a diagram) then I'm keen to meet with you.

OK there we go, I've got the gas out of my system, now what about the Worlds?

My introduction must surely be that this event was the most exciting, all absorbing and greatest aviation experience of my life - and I'm confident that I speak for the majority, particularly the PPG's for whom this was also a unique experience. Our S.A. Team training camps, all the strategic planning and finally the assembly of the whole S.A. Team and the receipt of our team kit, culminated in the excitement being electrifying. A little quirk of human nature that I won't easily forget is that I believed I had conditioned myself thoroughly in all aspects and then found this electrifying excitement intensify further at the mere sight of overseas competitors. Not unlike perhaps crawling nervously around in a cave and the beam of the torchlight suddenly illuminating a leopard crouched very near.

Now the cork wanted to come out of the bottle at ballistic pace, these were the competitors, thus far only spoken about, never seen and of completely unknown caliber. Experience is a wonderful thing and when I hopefully next go to a Worlds I will be conditioned to not quake at the mere sight of the quarry and to know that they are after all, just Pilots like we are.

Thank goodness for the practice days because it allowed introduction and communication with the other competitors and the French Paragliding National Champion was not the demon skygod previously envisaged, nor were the Germans who kept to themselves and spoke in hushed tones whilst gesturing towards our equipment, believe it or not they were actually nervous of us. With this mood having thawed out, we had a really good laugh when one of the German team later admitted having pointed me out to his compatriots shortly after their arrival, stating that I was a competition animal and the current S.A. National Champ and what's more I'm on my home airfield. If only they knew that certain of my body parts had set up a permanent quiver at that stage.

Having settled down in the practice days and commenced the building of some cherished acquaintances with the other competitors, we geared ourselves for the opening ceremony. What a feeling, standing with the whole team in magic matching flight suits watching the foreign teams assembling in their team regalia. We weren't quite glaring over the fence at each other, but there was an overpowering emotion of this being the real thing, the Big Time.

The ceremony was something to behold, the planning of which must give credit to Mike Blyth and Janet van Ginkel, the whole flow was so well orchestrated that it was charged with emotion. Although the invited dignitaries included the Minister of Home Affairs Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi and others, the delivery was kept light hearted and culminated with the Minister's bold solo rendition of Shoshaloza in which he was immediately joined with such patriotic vigor that even the foreigners were droning the bars out. We were then treated to a Zulu dance exhibition, choreographed in true ethnic fashion and loud, very loud. It became quite a spectacle with the sweaty bodies of the Zulu's swaying in rhythmic unison in a cloud of dust lit eerily by a single spot light, the incessant thumping of their drum occasionally drowned out by their 'war chanting'. I saw many a foreigner with that 1000 yard stare in their eyes, watching on absolutely enthralled, it was almost visible that they knew, they were now truly in Africa.

Laura Nelson our PPG Section Director smartly nominated two successive spot landings as the first task, this surely settled everyone down, her staff and the competitors. I remember thinking that if I duff it completely than at least this is only for 250 points each and we can all get the blues out of the system without the risk of major points losses. We were all visibly more confident and relaxed with affairs, even to the extent that I now looked forward with a competitive spirit to the first real task.

The first 'real' task was a busy Nav task which included FAI sector photos of some turnpoints, hidden markers on the ground and the most taxing issue of all, timed turnpoints, the take off order was of free choice but at 3 minute intervals. This proved to be a great task that I thoroughly enjoyed, though the 'home turf' issue gave me no specific advantage, I felt at home and confidently departed first as part of a tactical ploy. I knew that with this being my home field that I would be followed and I therefore deliberately elected a slow speed for the timing, in the belief that rivals would take off hoping to watch me in the forward distance making their navigation easier. The plan worked, they could not have known that I had planned a very slow flight speed and were forced, in their need to arrive at the timed points at their pre-declared times, to fly past me. Many Pilots passed me, all greeted with much cheer of course and I then watched them. My confidence, by now bordering on arrogance was short-lived when I realised on finals for base that I was one ground marker short. This marker had been placed at the entrance to the field at the departure point of the task - very sneaky Laura and it was sufficiently off course that it raised a formal protest that it should not be counted in the score. The protest was not upheld and I had to content myself to 3rd position for the task.

Michael Werner of Germany really turned one up for the books when he requested guidance and clarity on the FAI photo sector requirements, although a very experienced PPG Pilot, he had never in the past had to contend with FAI sectors. Having been adequately schooled by the Director, he went on to win this task with some exacting flying and impeccable photography.

And so the competition went on with a variety of demanding and very interesting tasks, the rule book stipulated that cross country nav tasks would not exceed 45 kms, we of course had to be given one of 44.5kms and it was certainly not a jolly patrol, it was very busy every time and all of the time.

What also went on and with no shortage of alacrity was the socialising and partying which everyone indulged in. It was this socialising more than anything else that was the catalyst to the development of great relationships, the trading of knowledge and the inevitable establishment of trading relationships. Coastal Microlight Flyers Club under the chairmanship of Nic Jones put in an incredible effort to make everyone comfortable and not just a little merry. They had spent months giving without reward to prepare the venue and then not surprisingly they manned their posts tirelessly for the entire competition. In particular was the Malan family with Shirley catering daily from breakfast, to running her 'trading store' and then doing bar duty until the wee hours every night, all in all, a major effort and accomplishment.

Lurking in the main hanger which was the catering Centre, affectionately known as the 'beer hall' was, as I came to learn a strategically adept practice. One evening Laura came bustling in to look for Barry Myrtle the owner of a private airstrip about 8kms away, to whom she chatted for a couple of minutes and disappeared back to her office. Having been briefed that the next day was a task that included 3 outlandings as part of a nav, it didn't take a rocket scientist to surmise as to the nature of Laura's need to find Barry. Reasoning that there was nothing wrong with being alert, having one's ear to the ground and gathering knowledge of our tasks, I duly approached Barry with the demeanor of a real 'know it all' and put it to him that I hoped that his place was all prepared and the grass cut etc., upon which he unbeknowningly rose to the occasion with unending details of what it would be like for us to fly in there. Viola, let's check it out.

As it happened the weather prevented the task from running the following morning and as you've already guessed, there was only the lingering smell of burning rubber left after our departure to acquaint ourselves with this unvisited field, it's approaches, etc. Though this was one of only two occurrences of my local knowledge playing a part, it didn't advantage us at all with the later nav being easy and straight forward for all. In fact the whole affair nearly proved fruitless when I damn near killed myself on departing the same field, it was a slightly uphill run and the old Fanpack wasn't too keen and when after some 30 odd arse splitting strides it groveled into flight, I was directly on line for power cables only about 40 paces ahead and closing fast. The all too common competition delinquency took over from better judgment and I pressed on in the hopes that I might just clear the lines until at about 15 paces off I hammered in a life saving hook turn to the left, realising half way through the turn and to my horror that there was another cable dead ahead and even higher. Talk about crises management, I flew, not over, but through the gaps in the big trees surrounding the farmhouse to emerge back at the runway having completed a totally unplanned 360 turn, with the marshals all on their feet and their chairs lying in the grass where they had sent them sprawling in their haste to witness a spectacular crash. Next time guys.

The only other potential local knowledge advantage that emerged was that of a photo given in a briefing, to be identified and the location thereof to be pinpointed on return to the scorer. I very, very smugly pinpointed the location before even leaving the briefing room, only to have the task canceled due to the weather and the same photo never used again. The lesson I learnt was that local knowledge counts a lot less than what skillful flying and airmanship does.

I could ramble on and bore you with the details of every task, but I'm forced to stick to my directive of keeping it short. I'll conclude with what I opened with, the Worlds was an experience and a pleasure that will hold top position of my greatest remembrances, unless toppled by another great Worlds in two years time. With no wish to be self indulgent, we the S.A. PPG Pilots did exceptionally well and are extremely proud of the achievement. We learnt from the Europeans at the closing ceremony of their respect for our performance in that they have been flying these FAI Coded tasks competitively for four years, we were introduced to them for the first time in April this year and they have flown all the tasks hundreds of times. We were placed second behind the French but ahead of the Germans, Japanese, Swiss, etc., with all four of our Pilots in the top ten and a warning to the French that they best watch their backs. I am certain that if we can encourage regular regional and annual national competitions that the ongoing competition exposure will make us serious contenders at any international competition.

Unlike the terribly unfortunate fatality in the Microlight section, the PPG's managed to run innumerable take offs, tasks and landings all without even one incident. Apart from the Pilots, some of the credit for this must surely go to Laura who was meticulous in her approach to the safety and conditions in which we were asked to fly. This Worlds must surely be written into the FAI annals as a great success and tremendously rewarding for all the Pilots, if I could indulge myself with this opportunity to mention that the S.A.PPG Team was supported to the extent that it undoubtedly had an impact on our result, by our team leader Mike Bosman who was relentless in his strategising, work and organisation, not to overlook a little arse kicking as well and he is a credit to MISASA and the sport. My father Ted, hired as my personal assistant had his nick name of Mr. Belvedere firmly entrenched with his continuous catering to my every need and that of the whole team. He left the day after the close for a Namibian tour that he probably needs after such a dedicated effort.

I say, long live Ultralighting and the People in it, thank you Mike & Janet and may we have many more.

Happy Landings  
STEVE McCURRACH

## THE PPG RESULTS

### The first ten places

<b>France</b>	<b>Alain Arnoux</b>	<b>Jet Pocket</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>Diddier Plisson</b>	<b>Adventure</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>P Georgeaguet</b>	<b>Jet Pocket</b>
<b>S.A.</b>	<b>Steve McCurrach</b>	<b>Fly 115</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>J Clement</b>	<b>Jet Pocket</b>
<b>Japan</b>	<b>E Matsuo</b>	<b>DK Whisper</b>
<b>S.A.</b>	<b>Louis Charnu</b>	<b>Paraventure</b>
<b>S.A.</b>	<b>Phil Bristow</b>	<b>DK Whisper</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>Michael Werner</b>	<b>Fresh Breeze</b>
<b>S.A.</b>	<b>Peter Wallenda</b>	<b>Fly 115</b>

### An excerpt of a feedback report to Fly - Italy

The French were 1st 2nd & 3rd and they completely outgunned the rest of the field and I learnt afterwards that they have been involved in serious competition, using the same type of tasks for the last four years, they were also flying gliders that are 15-20kph faster than us and it was very difficult to better that. I managed to come 4th and in view of the difference in experience and equipment, I am overjoyed with my result. The competition was stiff and we finally had a total of 9 scoring tasks, which is a good measure of the various skills and competitors.

There were 4 engine seizes with the DK Whisper pilots who also had a hard time getting into the air all the time from lack of power, there was a Swiss who's machine was so unreliable that he missed a few tasks and eventually broke the clutch and gave up, a Frenchman had a collapse with the glider and when it re-inflated the pressure of the lines on the prop guard broke the guard,

another competitor had a rivet on the airbox come loose and go through the motor completely wrecking the piston. So the two Fly's proved themselves to be good reliable machines, even in the demands of competitive flying.

You will be very happy to know that, of all the hours of training and the many hours of competition flying, my Fly 115 performed and behaved 100%, it gave no trouble at all.

Our results under the circumstances is fantastic and we need only do some propeller development and get faster gliders and I truly believe that we can beat them. I'm going to save really hard and try my best to make the World Air Games in Turkey late 1997, where they will have to watch out.