

## Andy Davis' Comment

Tactical flying has always been a component part of gliding competitions, there has always been less tactical risk in following others and flying in the gaggle than pushing on ahead and leading the gaggle. But the followers needed to be able to see the leaders either with their own eyes or with the assistance of ground spotters and so there were occasions in the past when there was a chance for competitors to slip away unseen and fly their own flight particularly in cloudy conditions or poor visibility. What has changed the game fundamentally in recent years is the use of FLARM and OGN tracking for tactical purposes. It is now possible for any pilot to see where every other competitor is at all times and how well they are doing. Any pilot who can use a computer screen and climb well can now compete with the world's best. We are only a short step away from glide computers using real time OGN information having the capability to tell us not only where and when the best climbs are but the best track to follow between climbs to optimise the glide. And only another short step to remove the pilot completely and have the tasks flown using auto-pilot or remotely piloted gliders.

An unwanted side effect of FLARM and OGN tracking is that competitors are able to follow each other's tracks more closely and congregate in the same climbs causing big gaggles which are being entered by pilot who may be closely watching their instrument screens rather than looking out and projecting their aircraft's flight path. This has resulted in a significant increase in the collision risk and danger of flying in competitions.

There is no doubt that FLARM is a truly effective safety aid which has saved many lives - not only competition pilots but also in the wider aviation community. Sadly we have allowed it to become a tactical tool which has increased the dangers to such a level that the safety benefits of FLARM have been completely outweighed. As a competition community we must find a way to return the use of FLARM to its original intent as a collision avoidance aid and stop its use for tactical purposes. It will not be easy to write suitable rules and difficult to police but where there is a will there must surely be a way.

We have allowed a culture to develop which accepts these increased risks as normal and as a community we do not apply enough pressure to change the behaviour of those pilots known to fly dangerously in competitions. It is common at competitions for certain pilots' names to be mentioned time and again for stupid, inconsiderate or dangerous flying. Very often the biggest penalty they receive is a few words from the Pilot Safety Committee or perhaps an Official Warning. What message does it send out to all pilots when a serial offender for dangerous flying only gets an Official Warning and another pilot who forgets to put his batteries in for the daily weighing gets a points penalty for the first offence? As a member of the Pilot Safety Committee at WGC Hosin I was stunned by the level of complacency and arrogance shown by some of the pilots whose behaviour in the air was brought to our attention. There must be some significant penalties that properly discourage unsafe behaviour whether deliberate or as a result of poor technique with a scale of penalties that quickly escalate to disqualification and suspension of FAI Sporting Licence for proven cases of dangerous flying.

I also call upon the competition community to consider rule changes which make it difficult to follow, take away the tactical pressures to fly in a dangerous manner and reward leading rather than following. Some rule changes which could be implemented immediately with current technology and

their benefits are given below – this list is not exhaustive and I am sure others will have many good ideas:

- Start altitude limit below forecast cloudbase / top of convection with speed limit = no pressure to circle at cloudbase before starting.
- Use of widely separated multiple start points = more than one optimum position to wait for the ideal start time, separating the pre-start gaggles.
- Start from point of tow release = no more pre-start gaggles.
- Use of the event button within 30 seconds of starting to validate the start. No restart within 10 minutes if not validated = will reduce tactical following and leeching.
- Bonus points for starting early / reaching the TPs first / every minute leading / every thermal found = will reward starting early / leading and should remove incentive to follow in gaggle.
- FLARM should be for collision avoidance only. No use of FLARM / OGN data for tactical purposes by mandatory time delay = should reduce following/ leeching + heads in the cockpit time.
- No use of ground to air Team radio for tactical purposes = reduce following / leeching.
- Mandatory monitoring of competition safety frequency in flight = stop use of radio for tactical purposes and allow direct communication between competing pilots for safety messages.
- Effective penalties for proven cases of dangerous flying including suspension of FAI Sporting Licence = should discourage dangerous flying more effectively than current penalty structure.

**Andy Davis 22/08/2018**