

Paramotor Freestyle

A discussion document for CIMA PF & PL Sub-Committee by Richard Meredith-Hardy, GBR delegate and sub-committee chairman.

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Introduction

[Mike Cambell-Jones' WMC2005 report](#) contains several recommendations which will no doubt be discussed at the CIMA Plenary meeting in November, one of the topics he raises is the notion of 'Freestyle' about which there has been a lot of talk lately in the Paramotoring fraternity. This document attempts to explain what Freestyle in Paramotors is, and presents some possible ways forward.

What is Freestyle?

Freestyle is NOT acro, Freestyle is not intended to be a replacement for 'traditional' championships, Freestyle is actually not really even something completely new, it's the preferred word for what may best be described as *Spectacular precision tasks for Paramotors*. Being able to show off their pilot skills in an entirely local environment seems to be something which is highly attractive to many Paramotor pilots, particularly young pilots.

Historically CIMA did actually make some progress in defining some new 'spectacular' tasks within the 'new' WAG concept but it did not develop very far because the 2005 WAG planning was abandoned at a fairly early stage back in 2003. Essentially it was envisaged that a WAG would have a limited number of selected pilots (chosen from a ranking system) and it would take the format similar to an equestrian three day event with eco and nav tasks at 'unpopular' times of day (usually early morning) and spectacular precision tasks in an arena in front of crowds at 'popular' times of day (usually evening).

The difference between what was envisaged for WAG and a Freestyle event is that Freestyle contains ONLY precision tasks and no nav or eco tasks at all.

Why not ACRO?

Paraglider acro manoeuvres are well described at www.acromania.nl/ Acro competition is a discipline described in *FAI Section 7-B Class O Paragliders (Less Accuracy) Class III Aerobatics*. It consists, rather like traditional Aerobatics, of a number of set-piece manoeuvres which are scored to a complex formula by an expert 5 member jury. Although acro may in future become a Paramotor discipline it is not discussed here as a part of Freestyle because the real attraction of Freestyle are the spectacular media and spectator possibilities at the top level of the sport which might use small venues, ideally in or near urban areas, possibly even at night, whereas acro competition is sufficiently dangerous to ALWAYS have to be performed at great height over large bodies of water with a reserve which is a severe restriction on the choice of site.

Freestyle rules & tasks

At present nobody has produced a set of rules for a Freestyle competition. There are some tasks already in the CIMA task catalogue (S10 Annex 4) which might serve as the basis to the start of a Freestyle competition but really it needs a completely new task catalogue if full benefit is to be made of the spectator and media possibilities.

Possible tasks include:

- Precision landing.
- Kicking sticks.
- 'Catching the dragon'; release a streamer and catch it again. Either one-on-one or against the clock.
- Kicking large tethered balloons. Either one-on-one or against the clock.
- 'Football'; Picking up large balls and dropping them in a basket. Could be one-on-one.
- Giant slalom; Slalom between large inflatable pylons, or even Mega Slalom between high-rise buildings. Either one-on-one or against the clock.
- Catching balloons; chasing small helium filled balloons and popping them. Either one-on-one or against the clock.

As the sport develops people will think of many more possibilities including team relay tasks.

Important themes must be:

- The task is obviously difficult and skilful to do well, ideally it should be possible for a layman to recognize and appreciate skilful flying in a task.

- Spectacular; think music, flags, streamers, large inflatable obstacles, flashes, bangs, smoke Etc.
- The possibility of simple instant scoring which can be allied to scoreboards and PA systems.
- Wind neutrality, or ideally complete wind independence (eg 'Catching the dragon')
- Happens at some height, or in a way all spectators can easily see a performance (which is why the standard precision landing isn't too interesting).
- One on one competition and/or team relays may be more exciting than tasks against the clock.

Freestyle and the FAI

In his championship report Mike C-J makes two controversial proposals. 1) That a working group should be established to radically alter championship rules in time for 2006, removing most of the precision tasks and 2) to create an entirely new kind of PRE/STYLE championship involving precision and acro tasks.

In reality neither proposal as written is practical, or desirable.

Mike C-J complains of the simple logistical difficulties of holding the traditional style of championship. It is true there are indeed many problems, but this is a management issue, not an inherent and terminal fault of the formula. New ways of running championships have already been tried successfully (eg [UK Nationals 2005](#)) and the technology of flight recording and analysis is developing at a great pace. It is nevertheless vital CIMA ensures very competent organizers are chosen to run championships or there is a high risk of failure. Ultimately however the principle of the 'traditional' championships should remain unchanged as it is designed to return a champion who demonstrates skill across a broad range of pilot skills; navigation, economy and precision.

A PRE/STYLE championship containing an acro element is also undesirable for a number of reasons:

- The location of a safe venue for the acro element is potentially an enormous restriction on the choice of potentially lucrative urban venues for a new style of championship.
- Acro may be spectacular to watch, but to most spectators the scoring is probably a complete mystery.
- There are probably a very limited number of pilots in the World competent to fly acro manoeuvres in paramotors. Acro carries with it a great deal of health & safety baggage associated with the fact that there is no recognized pilot or airworthiness qualification for any kind of aerobatic manoeuvres in Paramotors, let alone for advanced manoeuvres undertaken in a competitive environment.
- Paraglider acro championships require each pilot to have a release from the glider manufacturer, which is a difficult obstacle to overcome whilst no recognized certification program for paramotors or paramotor wings or paramotor reserves exists. Without it there is unlimited potential liability on an organizer in the case of an accident.
- Acro flights often entail violent tumblings, line twists and water landings which are dangerous enough without the added weight, inertia and moving parts of a paramotor.
- It could be argued that an acro paramotor competition could set a bad example by encouraging inadequately skilled pilots to try extremely dangerous manoeuvres with the wrong equipment at home.

What is very possible however is an entirely new kind of Freestyle competition containing 'spectacular precision tasks'. It is something completely separate from the traditional type of championship, probably done in a shorter time, two or three days max.

How to get Freestyle going

First it needs tasks. It is really up to the Paramotoring community at large to not just suggest ideas, but to TRY ideas in a local competitive environment at club or National level. FAI can act as a central repository for all these ideas and can even help to assemble a set of rules around them but is not necessarily the right body to actually lead the development of the discipline. In the early stages it really needs to be done by example.

Once there are tasks and rules there are many other questions to be answered:

- Will Freestyle championships be open to all pilots from all FAI member nations like a traditional championships, or because it may be possible for such championships at the highest level to occur with many spectators at small sites or 'difficult' urban environment, should it be restricted to a limited number of seeded or ranked pilots, and if so, how will they be selected?
- To truly benefit from the full media and spectator potential a complete package of airborne TV camera support, knowledgeable PA, live scoring, scoreboards and the specialist equipment required for some tasks needs to be assembled. Since NAC's have a poor record in doing all these things in traditional championships, should this instead be owned, maintained and perhaps even operated centrally and rented to the organizer?

In practical terms this means there is no possibility of a FAI Freestyle championship in 2006 or 2007 but if people show enough determination for the formula to succeed it could be happening by 2008.

World Cup Series

An alternative, or perhaps complimentary solution to 'pure FAI' may be some sort of 'World Cup Series' operated by an semi or completely independent organization to the FAI, perhaps something similar to the Paragliding World Cup. The idea is not so far-fetched; the 2005 Shanghai Qingpu Paramotor Open and the 2005 event in Korea show that there is an increasing amount of interest in this sort of thing and that substantial travel money and prize money is possible. A series run by a single operator has much better potential for the assembly of a complete package saleable to sponsors. What this needs is an investor/promoter, a businessman who is capable of selling the concept in half a dozen venues across the World.

Freestyle tasks in 'traditional' championships.

Once a Freestyle task catalogue has been created there is no reason why some tasks couldn't be used as an alternative to the precision tasks in the 'traditional' task catalogue. In fact to save duplication the best solution may be to remove all the precision tasks from the 'traditional' task catalogue altogether and use the Freestyle task catalogue for the precision tasks.

To make the end of a 'traditional' championship more exciting the possibility exists that a new provision in the rules for a 'cut' could be made where so long as the minimum number of tasks have been completed and the proportions are more or less correct, the top x pilots (perhaps 10) could fight out these top x places on the last day in a series of freestyle tasks in front of an audience and TV.

Conclusion

There is great potential for Freestyle. It has the unique property of being able to bring safe sport aviation to inner cities all around the World at a reasonable cost. It also seems to appeal particularly to the youthful elements in our sport which is vitally important for the future. However, as it's a completely new thing incomparable to anything anyone is doing at the moment it needs a completely new set of rules and tasks to be created. It is unlikely to happen on its own, it needs enthusiasm and energy from all parts of the Paramotor community to get it to work.