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The Perry XC/Racing Camp *“Flying the Palmetto State”* by Doug Jacobs

Here’s the idea. Pull together a group of experienced racing pilots, many of them US Team members who’ve represented the country somewhere on the globe. Get them to write up their thoughts on how to make a sailplane go around a cross-country course at warp speed. Assemble a fleet of high performance two place gliders for them to fly. Find a great place to go soaring. Invite pilots who are enthusiastic about soaring and who want to improve their skills. Create a safe and welcoming atmosphere devoid of ego games or competition stress, where the only dumb question is the one not asked. Lecture them each morning on all aspects of this fascinating challenge called motorless flight. Put them in the front seat or fly lead-and-follow with them all afternoon. Debrief over a beer and a good cook-out dinner. Add good weather and bake for a week.



What’s this a recipe for? A US Team XC/Racing camp! Organized and sponsored by the US Team Committee, there have now been seven camps over the last several years, a couple focused on Juniors and the rest for everybody. This spring’s effort was held at Perry, South Carolina, and was scheduled to take place the week before the Region 5 North competition so that graduates of the camp could go right into a week of racing to hone their skills. Led by mentors Doug Jacobs, Sam Zimmerman, Tim Welles, and Dave Welles, spiced up with a presentation or two from Richard Kellerman, and operated flawlessly by Sam Giltner, the camp attracted over 40 applications. Unfortunately capacity limitations forced that number to be narrowed down, but 23 eager beavers traveled to rural South Carolina from

as far away as New England, Texas and Ohio to enjoy the experience.

Historically, most cross country soaring in the United States has been self-taught. Only at a few sites are there organized efforts to help pilots who want to get away from the gliderport and out on course. And at virtually none is racing covered, let alone encouraged. This is in stark contrast to the highly developed and very productive efforts of many European countries where such programs result in a feeder crop of racing pilots. As a result, new faces at US competitions are all too rare – and the average age of the existing base of pilot competitors is climbing. Not a healthy thing for the long term viability of the sport we're crazy about.



To encourage more pilots to fly cross-country, and also to encourage those so inclined to do some racing, the US Team Committee has been hard at work, developing the concept, format and curriculum of these camps and staging as many as can be organized. Finding experienced mentors to take part has not been a problem – current and former members of US Teams have gladly volunteered their time and effort to make these camps a success.

Most feel that they've gotten a tremendous amount out of their racing careers, have been very grateful for the support shown them by the SSA membership, and are eager to give something back to the sport they love. It's also a lot of fun.

So it was at Perry – we had a great time. But I can't go any further in this narrative before recognizing the outstanding support and generosity of Al and Rhonda Tyler. These hard working folks put on one of the most successful contests in the country every April, inviting 65 plus pilots to their private field, where everyone finds great facilities, terrific social events, a very well organized operation, and lots of good flying. Imagine how



much work this is for them without the support of a large local club, or even that many local soaring pilots! But despite the need to focus all their efforts on getting ready for the contest, Al and Rhonda were instantly supportive of holding a camp the week before the contest, even though we all knew it would complicate their lives a bit more. We thank them heartily, and as Gren Seibel's used to say, "May their tribe increase".

The curriculum used at these camps has evolved over the past few years, and seems to be getting better and better.

Pre-reading such as Reichmann's Cross Country Soaring was assigned as a review. Besides the usual contest registration material, we also gave each participant a CD with all of the course presentations on it at the beginning of the week. Safety is emphasized from the word go – a full field and area briefing was conducted by an experienced local pilot – in this



case Al Tyler – and airspace issues were thoroughly discussed. The first morning presentation was on making safe outlandings, further driving the message home. We then moved on to general cross-country soaring, fundamentally consisting of thorough discussions weather, climbing, and running, with final glides as a special subset of the latter. After that it was on to racing rules, task strategy, decision making, and the like, with a supporting presentation or two on instruments or analysis software, and practical demonstrations like weight and balance and pneumatic leak checking. A week's worth of morning sessions seems like a lot of time in front of a projector screen (dubbed Power Point Hell by someone), but with lively presentations, and with lots of questions, answers, and discussion, we had a hard time getting through it all.



A racing task was called each day, usually a Turn Area Task, and a full weather briefing given. Everyone then split into separate groups, each led by a mentor, for a further task briefing. Three of the four mentors at Perry were flying Duo Discus's, so were able to take a pilot from their groups along in the front seat. The rest gathered together after launch at a rally point, switched to a discrete radio frequency, and headed out on course as a fox and hounds gaggle. Staying together underway can be a

challenge, but the participant is rewarded with a close look at how the mentor flies the task, and a running description of his decision making. Back on the ground at the end of the day, flight logs were collected, the PC's are powered up, and a further debrief session held to go over the finer points of the flight.

As usual, there was a challenge here and there. With few local motels, a fair number of the camp participants planned on tenting at the field, only to be met by freezing morning temperatures early in the week that even had the locals hard pressed to remember when it had been so cold so late in the spring. The morning sessions would have been akin to going to school in a meat locker had Al Tyler not located an industrial sized propane heater with 100 pound tank that blasted the place warm in a jiffy, and was everyone's favorite congregating spot during the breaks. Fortunately, it warmed up during the week, and the frostbite danger receded. The weather was flyable most days but only a few were up to Perry standard, and we didn't see a cu all week. But we sure did get lots of blue day practice in, and got several 100 mile plus days.



By the end of the week, camp participants felt like they'd learned a ton, both on the ground and in the air. The mentor flights in the Duo's were particularly well received – these airplanes are a terrific tool to show a new pilot what racing is really like, as pioneered by Karl Striedieck at myriad contests over the past several years. Special thanks for the use of these ships go to the Harris Hill Club, the Duo owner crowd at Greater Boston, and

to Larry Timpson who generously lent us his motorized version. Many campers felt the ground school was the best part of the course, and were particularly glad that the sessions gave them lots to analyze and practice in their own flying. Everyone completed the camp revved up to do some serious cross country over the rest of the season, and I've already seen a bunch of great flights turned in to OLC by some of them. And, to top it off, camper Heinz McArthur won a day in the Sports Class, handily polishing off one of his mentors. Well done, Heinz!

Two more camps are scheduled this summer. The first, run by Garrett Willat at Warner Springs in May, will be complete by the time this article appears. Another camp is scheduled for August at Harris Hill in Elmira. Tim and Dave Welles will be back, as will Doug Jacobs, and the entire Harris Hill team will support the camp. For more information, check out the Team web site http://www.ssa.org/UsTeam/ust_camps.htm.

