

To: Ken Sorenson, SSA Chair
From: John Godfrey, Chair, SSA Competition Rules Committee
Subject: Report for February 19/20 SSA BOD meeting
Date: January 31, 2016

1. Contest Safety

There were no contest-related fatalities. Reported accidents/incidents were:

- Motorglider-related:
 - Perry, failed air start and outlanding, minor damage and no injury
 - New Castle, failed air start and crash with severe injury, aircraft destroyed
 - Fairfield, loss of control after engine start on grid when #2, damage but no injury
- Other:
 - Perry, crash after cylinder finish off field, major damage, minor injury
 - Hobbs, crash after cylinder finish next to alternate runway, major damage, no injury

Also, there were two accidents in sanctioned but non-contest events, one at Logan and one at Nephi (ground operation rather than flight). Both had serious injuries.

Promoting participation in fair and satisfying competitions consistent with acceptably safe operations is the most important goal of the Rules Committee. All other objectives and rules changes are considered in this context.

2. Significant Rule Changes for 2016

The proposed rule changes have been submitted in a separate document. The most significant are as follows:

a. There are no FLARM related rules changes proposed for 2016

b. List of Gliders Eligible to Compete in US Club Class

The Rules Committee initiated a dialog with the US Team Committee to align the list of gliders eligible to compete in US Club Class and to qualify for the US Team. The handicap bounds were reduced to 1.02 to 0.89 (lower performance gliders can compete, but get only a 1.02 handicap); the wingspan is limited to 15m maximum; and no two place gliders are allowed.

c. Standard Class becomes a permanently handicapped class.

It will use a derivative of the Sports Class handicap list developed by Hank Nixon and used by waiver in previous years

d. Two pilots flying together every day in a two place glider may be scored as a team in FAI Classes

This affects Open Class. Seeding and entry priority will be handled as for Sports Class.

3. Issues in Play

a. Technology in the Cockpit (including FLARM)

At its November meeting, the Rules Committee provisionally decided that, subject to additional vetting, FLARM Stealth mode would be required at National Contests. This precipitated a loud and fractious outpouring of comments, parts of which centered on whether external electronic telemetry should be allowed in competition and parts of which centered on safety.

Historically, any form of external assistance (human or electronic) has been forbidden in competition. Examples include: location and flight tracking of competitors through FLARM or tracking sites, access to weather radar, satellite imagery, and updated forecasts to name a few. Any decision to change this is a major change to the way competitions are conducted.

The only deviation from this is the now old decision to allow GPS and moving map displays, which encountered a similar “high spirited” debate.

The National-level pilot community is sharply split on this issue.

Vigorous debate on this issue is appropriate and should continue. The issue will be discussed and polled again. To the extent practical, any changes will be (as is always the case with a major change) tried at the regional level first.

b. FLARM

There are no FLARM related rules changes being proposed this year.

The Rules Committee is a very strong supporter of the enhanced safety margins offered by FLARM. Reported FLARM adoption at the National level is high (94% vs 78% overall in competitions). However, as FLARM in the US is a single-source vendor with limited technical support capability deployed we are not contemplating making FLARM mandatory by rule (however, waivers to require FLARM are always granted to organizers that request them).

The issue of whether FLARMS should be required to operate in a reduced sensitivity (“Stealth”) mode in competition is first a safety issue and second a “Technology in the Cockpit” issue. The 2015 National at Harris Hill was conducted with Stealth required and generated positive comments with respect to safety (save for one unsubstantiated negative comment).

However, after quantitative analysis, discussions with the BGA, IGC and the FLARM technical staff we determined that Stealth mode as currently implemented does not provide the margins we see necessary (especially in the west) and therefore reversed our initial provisional decision (which was driven by limiting competitively useful telemetry – see 3a).

The Committee will revisit this as any changes to the Stealth mode are released and the debate of 3a continues to unfold.

c. Cellphone-based Tracking

The Rules Committee vote (with one very strong dissent) to allow the use of smartphone technology to send (but not receive) tracking data. Unfortunately, we recently became aware of FCC rules that seem to prohibit such use, and at this writing need further clarification.

Respectfully submitted,
John Godfrey (QT), Chair