

PARA EXCELLENCE

BY HOWARD TRAVERS



British Nationals and third British Open 4th - 9th August, Piedrahita, Spain

Piedrahita is one of the best flying venues in Europe. At the combined six-day Open and final Nationals round the site was true to form, although only three days of the competition were valid and the 14,000ft cloudbase of two years before was absent. Confident ridge work, considerable skill (tempered with a degree of luck) in negotiating the pass at Villafranca, knowledge of how to use the convergence, patience in weak lift and fast glides between strong thermals (averaging 1500 - 1,800ft/min) were the order of the day. Most of the 120 competitors (including 50 Nationals pilots) were British but a few Spanish, French, Australian and South African pilots entered too.

Winds were quite strong from the west for most of the week but it remained sunny and warm for all but one day. Monday saw the first valid task, an ambitious 104.6km via four turnpoints to goal. The conditions were weak once over the pass and only three pilots, Mike Cavanagh (Pro-Design), Ian Blackmore (Pro-Design) and Gill Hartley (Nova) made it past the third turnpoint, but after 70km none of them could fight back to Piedrahita from Avila against the strong headwind.

No one was able to reach goal (72km) on the second task, but Ulrich Jessop (Airwave) landed just 3km short. Flying was cancelled on the Wednesday due to strong winds but Thursday saw a 102.9km race to goal via five turnpoints. The day was superb but required a good appreciation of the conditions. Patience was required at times; at others full speed, trimmers off and full speed bar were needed. Many pilots were decked early and the most obvious route from the fourth turnpoint decked all but one of the remaining 20. The lone pilot who recognised the problem and, by doing a 20km detour, got the last turnpoint and made it to goal was Steve Ham, local guru and host for the competition. His 1,000 points for the task secured the Open for him from Ulrich Jessop and Ron McKenzie. The highest placed woman pilot was Gill Hartley followed by Judy Leden and Kaz Harland.

British Open results

1	Steve Ham	Airwave Alto XM	Airwave (sponsor)	2400
2	Ulric Jessop	Airwave Alto XM	Airways	2080
3	Ron McKenzie	Edel Sector		2053
4	Mike Cavanagh	Pro-Design High 68	Pro Design	2023
5	Innes Powell	Airwave Alto XM		2010
6	Patrick Holmes	Edel Saber	Edel	1991
7	Jocky Sanderson	Nova Xenon	Carrington	1901
8	Pete Bridson	US Voiles Hurricane	Snowdon Gliders	1893
9	Peter Brown	Edel Sector	Edel/Skyview	1884
10	Richard Carter	Airwave Alto XM	Airways	1849

The Nationals provided an even closer result with 500 points covering the top seven pilots. In the end Barney Barnes (Airwave) took the title,



Pilots set off on the third task at the Piedrahita Nationals

closely followed by fellow Isle of Wight resident Innes Powell (Airwave), who also took the best newcomer award.

Ian Blackmore (7th) deserves special mention. At last year's Nationals at St André (probably the best flying of the year) the rules were not totally clear and some latitude was given to pilots by the Panel. This brought a storm of criticism and some justifiably harsh comment. This year the rules were tightened up and applied strictly by the jury, costing Ian his 1,000 point win in the first task of the first leg - and probably the championship - all through a simple camera fault.

Sadly, two pilots were injured at Piedrahita, one during practice and one in the competition. I'm happy to say both Dave Snowdon and James Davidson are recovering well and will be flying soon.

An encouraging facet of this year's competition was the popularity of the Open and the much higher standard of flying displayed. It is also clear that the domination of the top places by just a few pilots is now being supplanted by a new breed of skilful and talented pilots, something which bodes well for the future in World and European competition.

1996 Nationals results

(Top 25 qualify for the 1997 Nationals)

1	Barney Barnes	Airwave Alto XM	Airwave (sponsor)	4379
2	Innes Powell	Airwave Alto XM		4266
3	Richard Westgate	Edel Sector Proto	Sky Systems/Animal/ Firebird	4217
4	Hugh Miller	Nova Xyon	Skyview	4069
5	Peter Brown	Edel Sector	Edel/Skyview	4013
6	Ulric Jessop	Airwave Alto XM	Airways	3769