

PILOT PROFILE

A continuing series of profiles of people in the sport



Alpine flying is very over-rated; too much bad weather, nasty landing areas and ridge soaring.

When and where was your most memorable flying experience?

The ones that hurt are always quite memorable. Doing my first 100km out-and return at the Forbes hang Gliding Flatlands in 1990 with my keys in my pocket. After six hours they had worn a groove in my hip. Head-butting a wall in the 1992 Spanish hang gliding Nationals and hitting the ground under a reserve in a gust front last year are not so remote in my mind every time I take off either.

Who do you most admire in the sport?

I admire all those who have achieved results in top-level competition, especially those who have been there in both hang gliding and paragliding. Of those I know personally I'd put Bruce Goldsmith on the pedestal since he's been there, done it, continues to be enthusiastic and is a thoroughly nice chap.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself? Impatience.

What is the trait you most deplore in others? Nastiness.

When not flying, what do you do for recreation? Reading and playing with most sorts of toys - though my impatience usually gets them broken or forgotten soon enough.

What is your favourite piece of music? No street cred here I'm afraid - *Wonderful Day* from *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

What is your favourite film? *Europe Europa*, which is a true account of a young Polish Jew's role changes from devout Jew to Communist and to Hitler Youth during the Second World War. I guess it appeals to the chameleonesque in me.

What is your favourite book? *The Flashman Papers* by George MacDonald Fraser. The snivelling coward becoming a national hero by accident - another favourite theme of mine.

What is your greatest fear? Giving up.

What is your idea of perfect happiness? Having nice toys and good company, time and the means with which to enjoy them.

What would your motto be? Life's not a rehearsal.

How would you like to be remembered? In 1961 a chimpanzee named HAM (acronym for Holloman Aerospace Medical Centre) made the first US space flight. His reward? A banana and an afternoon on the dissection table. Shortly after, Alan Shepard made an identical flight and was rewarded with a ticker-tape reception on 5th Avenue, a medal from the President and fame and fortune. It's tough as hell to be remembered at all with a name like Ham.

32 STEVE HAM

Although resident in Spain Steve flies in the British Nationals, this year netting the UK distance record with a flight of 175km. He also held the unofficial European distance record until John Silvester took it from him last year. Formerly a successful hang glider pilot, he now runs Airwave's Spanish operation and this year organised the Piedrahita World Cup round. 1994 saw him fly in the British Team at the Preddvor European Championships and on more than one occasion he's been in contention for a Worlds Team place.

Age: 32 Marital status: Single.

Born: Bristol.

Where do you live? Piedrahita, Spain.

Occupation: Administrator for Airwave Spain, paragliding instructor, competition organiser.

Any previous occupations? English teacher, securities dealer, hang gliding bum.

How and when did you start flying? A few

days at a school in Kent in 1982, then properly and obsessively when I started with Paul Farley in South East Wales in 1987.

Which pilot(s) most influenced you? Mark Haycraft was my guru in the Avon Club, who dragged me across the cross-country routes of the West Country and encouraged me to start competition.

What is your favourite flying site in Britain? Ubley, since it's so pretty, works well and faces just the right way to fly down to Cornwall in those lusher north-easterlies. I think Britain is the nicest place I know for cross-countries when the weather co-operates.

What is your favourite flying site in Europe? Piedrahita because of its massive cross-county potential combined with comfortable access, easy landings and mega soaring conditions... although in a north-easterly Ubley is nicer.

What is your favourite flying site in the World? I like the Australian flatlands a lot and also Bright. It's probably one of the reasons I based myself in Piedrahita since it's very similar in conditions and terrain. I also like Governador Valadares in Brazil a lot. I think

JOE SCHOFIELD