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A victorious Russ Ogden at the Piedrahita Open



Task underway at Piedrahita

British Open, Piedrahita

What a record breaking year! The largest British Open was a great success, with 134 competitors from 17 nations doing battle over Piedrahita. The stage was set by the now-infamous XC Mag 100th edition party, with dancing and tequila cocktails running till the very early hours, and practice day saw a booming sky and many sick pilots.



Task 1. The forecast said wind from the north, never ideal at Piedrahita. A 91km race to goal around six turnpoints was set. Half the field were off real quick in the rising wind. The other half got trapped as the launch was closed and opened again, but everyone launched in the end.

The ride out to the corrals was slow and buoyant, and the trip back a fair bit quicker. And so went the day; slow out and fast back, slower out and faster back. To quote Ulric Jessop, "The wind was definitely a factor today." Belgian Paul Schmit (Air Cross Ultima 3) crossed the line first ahead of Adrian Thomas (Airwave Proto) and Russell Ogden (Ozone Proto).

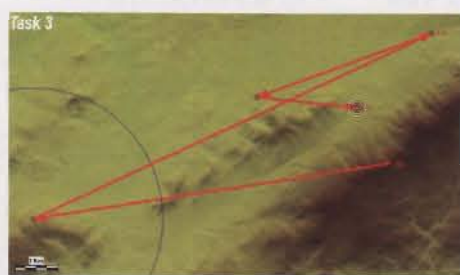
32 pilots made goal in a hard fought headwind-in-every-direction day. There were some unexpected lumps along the way and reserves were thrown by

Arek Pomeranski, Peter Taylor and Frank Renesse. Arek actually had his reserve caught in his main and needed to cut his lines on one side to free it! Where is your emergency bridle knife?

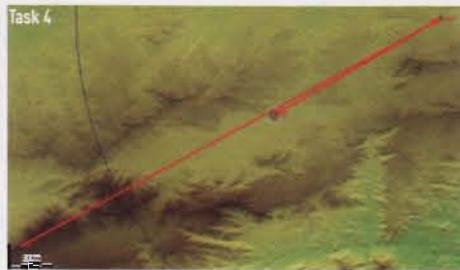


Task 2. Super light northerlies were forecast but the wind on launch was brisk. A 102km race to goal via a turnpoint at Avila was set. Although strong, the launch was fine for everyone, some going to over 3,000m from launch and others grovelling most of the way to the pass. The lead gaggle overshot the start gate before it opened and had to go back 3km, so a huge number of pilots were spread out on course, generally downwind-gliding to the turnpoint. The return leg was completely different to the north-west wind pushing people to the southern mountains. The pass and the high ground was always going to be the crux, where knowledge and skill would win through. Those who got the climbs kept pushing and the racers pushed hard and fast. 43 pilots made goal led by veteran Bob Drury (Gradient RSF), followed by "Mali" Maliszewski (Axis Mercury) and Cecilio (Gradient RSE). To quote Mark Watts, "A good day, a long task and nearly as good as it gets." Two reserves were thrown, one landing harmlessly but high in the mountains and the other pushing too fast into goal and landing on a roof!

Task 3. A 75km race to goal was set around three turnpoints with a northerly forecast. The day looked stable and calm and only a couple of pilots launched



when the window opened. Gradually pilots flopped off the hill to be greeted with good, smooth climbs to over 3,700m! The race was on as we pushed on towards Candelario. Some stayed very high and got very cold; others stayed low and battled with the heat. The day was fairly classic with strong climbs and stronger sink. The secret was to guess where the convergence would move to next. 70 pilots made goal with a spread of nearly four hours. Spanish pilot Ivan Colas (Gradient Avax RSF) was fastest in an incredible 97 minutes. Next was Borja Rodriguez (Gin Boomerang 4), then Kelly Farina (Airwave Magic FR2). John Ellison and Cecilio Valenzuela chucked their washing as they hit the wormholes. John broke a leg and Cecilio was just bruised. John said if it hadn't been for his sturdy boots he would have sustained a lot more damage.



Task 4. The forecast was for a very strong day and clouds started popping at 9am. A 119km race to



Adrian Thomas launches at Pena Negra



Mark Watts get away

goal around one turnpoint was set. The clouds looked huge and threatening but had shadowed launch long enough to kill the thermals to a dead calm. Pilots launched in two groups separated by about an hour as the wind came over the back for long periods. The first thermal eluded many but those who got it went to the clouds far slower than predicted. So the day went on, with pilots dropping out on route. Only 13 made goal behind Russell Ogden (Ozone Proto), followed by Mali and Evzen (Gradient Avax RSF). Rain threatened a cancelled task but the showers were short-lived. The reserve count increased as Maryna Strydom got in a mess trying to B-line out of cloud and Pascal Vandijk plummeted into a gorge, surviving a terrible landing. His reserve was too small, descending at 13m/sec (20mph!). What size is your reserve?

Four tasks averaging 97km and taking between three and six hours to complete - Piedrahita at its most classic. Neil Roberts reached 13,500ft, returning over the pass in an 18-up. Convergence

occurred on most days with speed glides at 11,000ft for miles and miles. Ten reserves were thrown and the smaller ones came down alarmingly quickly.

1	Russell Ogden	UK	Ozone Proto
2	Wojciech Maliszewski	Poland	Axis Mercury
3	Borja Rodriguez	Spain	Boomerang 4
4	Paul Schmit	Belgium	Air Cross U3
5	Adrian Thomas	UK	Airwave Proto
6	Craig Morgan	UK	Advance Omega 6

Top team: Airwave (Adrian Thomas, Kelly Farina, Alex Coltman, Steve Etherington, Roger Fowkes)

Overall standings			
1	Russell Ogden		Ozone Proto
2	Mark Watts		Gradient Avax RSF
3	Adrian Thomas		Airwave Proto
4	Kelly Farina		Airwave FR2
5	Neil Roberts		Gradient Avax RSE