

F2D News - March 2006

Mark Rudner
rudner@mit.edu

At long last, Spring is (supposedly) here. It sure didn't look like it this afternoon when snow was blowing like crazy outside my office window, but the longer days and occasional comfortable temps are a nice indication of the wholesome fair weather goodness that's around the corner. For those of us living in the frozen tundra, that means that it's time to start dusting off the equipment for the new season. In fact I've heard that a few guys have already gotten out to do some flying on the scattered nice days we've had, which is great.

For me the transition back into combat season seems to be on an accelerated pace this year. Not following any of my own best advice, I'm skipping the whole training phase and diving right into competition next week in Phoenix, AZ. Although it's a far from ideal situation, it would be a shame to pass up this opportunity to participate in a fine competition full of many great pilots. Bryce Gibson and Chris Renton from New Zealand are planning to attend, as well as many of the US's own top pilots.

Because of this odd situation, I know (from experience) that my flying will be rusty and hence understand that my prospects for winning are probably limited. Rather than not flying, however, I will try to use this opportunity as a learning experience. Flying rusty is something that most of us have to go through during this part of the year. For me this is something rather new, as growing up in southern California we were able to fly all year-round. I have a hunch, however, that careful introspection throughout this period can help one grow to understand the nature of his/her own rustiness, which can in turn lead to a more rapid and less costly path back to peak performance.

In addition to the benefits of self-analysis in terms of shaking off the winter cobb-webs, I think it's interesting to try to understand the reasons for the particular flavor of rust one develops over a period of inactivity. Which aspects of your flying have remained solid? Which have suffered most? Did any new tricks that you learned last season survive the time off?

Somehow it seems that the rust is actually telling you something important – the skills that suffer the most are likely those that you have the weakest grasp on. Pay attention to what maneuvers or situations make you feel uncomfortable at this time, and you may be surprised to find that some things that seemed to be under control last season really weren't quite there. In this way, you can turn the off-season rust into an excellent resource to help you tailor your training to focus on those areas that need the most strengthening and push your flying to a new level.

Good luck to everyone in 2006. Hope to see you in the circle soon!