

F2D News - August 2007

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15.08.07 - WINDSOR, UK: I'm coming to you remotely this month from Windsor, UK. I'm over here for work connected with my studies, but as luck would have it the timing of the trip coincided with that of an F2D contest in the northern part of the country near Newcastle upon Tyne. This contest was originally scheduled to take place the same weekend as the big Houston F2D contest in the US. Both venues were plagued by heavy winds that weekend, and while it was possible to forge ahead and complete the contest in Houston, the British competition was postponed to August.

One of the coolest side effects of competing in this international sport of ours is the opportunity it creates to make great friends all around the world. The American and British F2D teams have a long standing friendly rivalry that extends back at least as far as I can remember, and undoubtedly longer. It's always loads of fun when we get together, and this time was no exception. My generous Novocastrian hosts Martin and Ben Johnson and Dave Riley greeted me at the train station, and off we headed straight to the local pub to catch up and unwind.

On Friday, the Johnson family took me on a driving tour of the beautiful English countryside, and out to Bamburgh Castle. The castle has been standing on a hill overlooking the beach on the northeastern coast of England in various forms for on order of 1000 years. The "modern" incarnation of the castle is around 500 years old. The inside has been turned into a museum full of all kinds of cool stuff. That was really a treat to see.

The contest was scheduled for Sunday, so Saturday morning we ventured out to a vacant lot in a nearby industrial park for some test flying. Because my focus for this trip was primarily academic, I wasn't able to bring along enough gear to fly a whole contest. I did, however, bring along an engine to run in and to use for some practice matches. Martin and Ben lent me a Dementiev model and we were ready to go. The wind steadily picked up pace all morning, and by the time we were done testing models in preparation for the contest, it was sufficiently intense that it was clear where any attempt at practice matches was going to end up.

In the mean time, however, Dave put me on one of his F2E models. For those who are not familiar with this event, F2E is a diesel combat event that has become very popular in England and Europe in the last several years. In contrast to the sputtering diesel models I'd seen floundering around the sky in the past, this was a high performance machine. The rules of F2E sound pretty similar to the single airplane F2D event we often fly in the states, except that everyone has to run 2.5 cc diesels. One advantage of the diesels is that they run on resilient plastic propellers that are capable of withstanding most crashes allowing for very quick pit stops. The flat-out speed of the models is a bit lower than top-notch F2D equipment yet still fast enough to get some adrenaline pumping, making it a lower carnage event that is probably especially appealing to new pilots.

Don't tell anyone, but I have to admit that I was pleasantly surprised with the feel of that model. At the risk of being banned from flying back home ever again, I also have to confess that I flew a vintage diesel model. It was just one time though, and I swear I didn't inhale. I'll never do it again, I promise!

Early Sunday morning we headed out for the contest site, which was an army base about 20 minutes from the Johnson's house. That weekend, the base also happened to be hosting a classic motorcycle race and military exercises. On our way in, we were warmly greeted (intercepted?) by an armoured missile-launching tank of some sort. Fortunately the driver (on the right hand side!) believed our story and let us in to play with our toy airplanes. (Side note: riding in the front seat of a car driving on the left side of the road is a traumatic experience not suited for the faint of heart.) The site itself was beautiful, with nearly golf-course quality grass for several hundred yards in all directions. Ah, paradise.

We had 11 pilots, and one full-time mechanic (me). This compact field contained quite a high density of talent, however, with a very high standard of flying across the board. The British F2D combat community has

adopted an interesting interpretation of the usual F2D rules, dubbed "Dutch Rules." To reduce destruction, Dutch Rules require pilots to fly legitimate defense after fully removing an opponent's streamer. In principle this reduces a lot of model bashing and leads to a lot more exciting combat action for everyone. It's definitely a sporting way to fly and seemed to generally work well, though carnage levels were fairly high nonetheless.

Throughout the day, several people asked me how the contest compared with our contests back home. Combat is combat, of course, so in that respect things were quite similar. Since I pitted in every match, I had sort of a unique opportunity to see first hand what kind of equipment/pitboxes almost everyone was using. What I noticed was that pitting setups were surprisingly uniform compared to those I've seen in the US. With one exception, I think all of the streamer hooks I got to play with were of one design. In the US, it seems that nearly everyone has his own particular variation on the streamer hook. Another item of surprising uniformity was fuel pinch-offs. This is another piece of gear that I've seen probably hundreds of variations on, from haemostats to modified clothespins, to on-board bent-wire pinch-offs. Here I didn't see a single model with an on-board pinch-off, and furthermore *everyone* used the same metal spring clamps for this purpose. This level of standardization made it much easier to bounce between pitting for various people, though unfortunately everything was a little different from what I'm used to and led to a few minor fumbles.

Something less pleasant that reminded me of some things I've witnessed back in New England was the lack of a clearly marked outer circle. Admittedly, the thought of spraying graffiti on that beautiful army grass with missile launchers pointed right at us was a bit daunting. However, the absence of the circle led to a few mildly unsafe situations, and eventually to some controversy in the final match. As far as I can tell, the problem was that one team's mechanics began working on the model apparently inside the imaginary circle. The circle marshal told them to move the model out, which they did. The problem then was that they moved the model 3 or 4 meters outside of where this imaginary circle seemed to be. Because it was so far out, a mechanic from the opposing side later ran over the lines to fetch his downed model. Ordinarily this would be a disqualification, but under the circumstances no penalty was assessed.

In such a situation where painting an outer circle is not permitted, even a series of markers could make a big difference. Strips of yellow caution tape 6-8" long nailed to the ground through 3" x 3" cardboard squares can perform this function very well. It only takes a few minutes to set up, and can avoid a lot of problems later on. Rules aside, I always worry about the safety of mechanics when I see them pitting under airborne models. It adds an element of danger that we don't really need these days and as we saw in the finals, can lead to unnecessary scoring complications as well. Let's all agree to pay more attention to this in the future and play it by the book.

When the day drew to a close, Dave Riley of the Novocastrians came out on top, with Mervyn Jones 2nd and Mike "Whacker" Whillance 3rd. I had a great time, and really enjoyed seeing all my old friends again. Finally I would especially like to thank the Johnson family for their very generous hospitality including a series of wonderful home cooked meals. Hope to see you all again soon!