

F2D News - May 2010

Mark Rudner
rudner@mit.edu

CONTEST REPORT – Houston F2D, 1-2 May 2010 – Earlier this month, many of the top pilots in North America converged on Houston, TX for the annual Houston F2D meet. This year the field was especially strong, with 36 pilots from the US, Canada, and Mexico, plus the current World and European Champions Stas Culachkin and Igor Dementiev from Moldova. Aside from the 2004 World Championships in Muncie, IN, this could well have been the best F2D contest of the century so far in America.

The quality of flying was quite high all around, with a lot of good matches from a wide variety of pilots. This was especially impressive given the windy conditions, which would ordinarily lead to incredible amounts of carnage. Amid all the great flying, there were still several unfortunate incidents of shutoff malfunctions causing pilots to land at inopportune times. There was also one incident (in the fly-off for 3rd place) in which a shutoff did not successfully stop a model's engine after the lines were cut. This case was a close call, as the model didn't fly very long before hitting the ground. However, it seemed to fly long enough to tell that it wasn't showing any signs of shutting down, so I think it was a fair decision.

Part of the reason for the great turnout was the attendance of Stas and Igor. People seemed generally excited to meet them, and to witness their extremely high level of flying. This helped bring a really nice atmosphere to the contest. I was particularly fortunate, as I got the chance to fly against both of them on the second day. Recently I haven't been able to fly much, but those intense matches really energized me and brought back the excitement of flying. Stas and Igor are great guys on and off the field, and I look forward to seeing them again soon.

On a more technical note, I would like to make one comment about rules. Specifically, I have rule 4.4.11 i) in mind: "In the case of a line tangle where the circle marshal estimates the tangle cannot be cleared, he can require both pilots to land immediately. Ground time will start from the circle marshal's signal. After the models have landed the heat will continue as normal." This is a relatively recent addition to the rule book, which always seemed quite strange to me. From a safety standpoint (i.e. preventing flyaways) it perhaps makes some sense, but it was never clear how it could ever work in practice. Before this contest, I had never actually seen this rule invoked, so of course the first time it came up was during one of my matches. Well, I can tell you that this business is way too complicated. Aside from the need to coordinate between the center marshal and timers, there's also the problem of who is actually going to crash his model first. In our case, we had a mid-air shortly after the center marshal called for us to put our handles on the ground (neither of us was to the ground yet, so it didn't really have any effect on us). My model stayed up and my opponent's went down. Should I have still crashed anyway? That sounds pretty weak. After that match there was a decision to ignore that rule for the rest of the contest (or perhaps we should say to impair the center marshal's powers of estimation, thereby preventing him from ever arriving at the decision to make such a call). Personally, I think it would be a good idea to forget about that rule in general. If we get electronic shutoffs someday which the judges can activate remotely in such situations, then it could become a much more effective and practical safety measure. For now I think it's likely to cause more harm than good.

In the end, the top three places went to Igor Dementiev (1st), Mark Rudner (2nd), and Mike Willcox (3rd). The contest was really well run, and the judging fair and consistent throughout. Special thanks goes out to the Jetero R/C club for letting us hold the event at their field. A great time was had by all, and I hope it will grow even bigger next year!

NOTE: While finishing this report, I was deeply saddened to hear the news that a dear friend and fellow combat pilot, Steve Hills, passed away this weekend at his home in Florida. Steve was a great pilot and a true innovator. Among his technical contributions to the sport were several very successful designs of Fast combat models (most notably the "Arrowplane"), and many ingenious fuel shutoff designs in the early 1990s when the concept of the fuel shutoff was still in its infancy.

Beyond these technical contributions, however, Steve was a great guy who did a lot to promote our sport around the country. Whether you realize it or not, many (if not most) of your are familiar with his artwork, which has been featured on T-shirts (e.g. the New England Championships logo), fliers, and newsletters for

several decades. Steve was also a great mentor and teacher. I know this on a very personal level, because Steve is the one who taught me how to fly when I was a young kid. He gave me a training model which had clearly been used to teach many previous young pilots how to fly. I may have been the last in the line of students to beat up that model, but it got me started and I have never put down the handle since.

While this news has made me very sad, it also has caused me to take some time to reflect on Steve's influence, and beyond that, on all of the great times and friendships I've made through flying combat. Earlier in the day, before receiving the news, I had been out flying with Greg Wornell, discussing ways to solidify his inverted flying. Looking back, I realize many of my suggestions can be traced directly back to what Steve taught me nearly 20 years ago. He may be no longer with us, but his legacy lives on. Thanks Steve!