

F2D News Contest Report - 2006 F2D World Cup in Novomoskovsk, Ukraine

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SPECIAL REPORT - 13 October 2006 - The F2D NEWS took the month of September off this year in order to give our staff (i.e. me) some time to take care of business and to prepare for the 2006 F2D World Cup in Novomoskovsk, Ukraine. Novomoskovsk is a medium-sized town on the northern outskirts of Dnipropetrovsk, the second largest city in Ukraine. The contest was held just outside the grounds of a resort complex featuring guest houses with saunas, a restaurant and bar, the Hotel Samara (where we stayed) and much more that I'm sure we missed, but more on the site later.

The trip began from me on the evening of Tuesday October 2nd, when I departed from Boston's Logan International Airport on the ever-reliable North-west Airlines. Due to recent delays on NWA (a friend was forced to miss his connection to Minnesota just days earlier), I was a little concerned about my connection in Amsterdam. A quick check of the itinerary calmed my nerves, however, as I discovered that I would have a full five hours to burn in Amsterdam. Rest assured, time was the only thing burned in Amsterdam on this trip.

The flights and layover were rather uneventful, though I did meet a guy in the airport who volunteered quite a wealth of knowledge on how to use the internet to set up dates before traveling to Ukraine and Russia. It didn't sound like he was planning to fly model airplanes when he arrived in Kyiv.

I on the other hand was planning to meet up with Stanislav Chorny, currently one of the hottest F2D pilots in the world. Since the World Championships in Spain this summer, he has flown in four international F2D competitions and won all four of them. Before heading to the airport in Boston, I realized that I had left Stas' business card on my desk at home, and decided to go back for it *just in case*. This turned out to be a good decision, because after blitzing through customs in Kiev I emerged into the wild to find Chorny nowhere in sight.

I knew that the way to avoid being harassed and/or scammed in the airport was to come out looking confident and moving with conviction until meeting up with my local friends, after which I would be in the clear. The strategy worked well for the first 2 or 3 minutes, but once it became clear that my ride wasn't on location the clueless/lost foreigner expression began to creep onto my face. I fought it as

hard as I could, but after roaming around aimlessly for 5 or 10 minutes with bags in hand, it wasn't up to my face to betray the situation. The taxi drivers caught on and like vultures began swooping in on me with promises of a "cheap fare" and a "receipt if [I] need." Fortunately most of their attacks were easily perried by a simple "nyet spasibo," though occasionally it was necessary to follow it up with a "friend coming."

To my luck, one such taxi driver saw me puzzling over the pay phone which had instructions written only in Russian. He had his cellphone out and asked if I needed to make a call, which I was sure was the opening line for some sort of scam. At that point, however, I had little choice but to say yes and keep a close eye on the surroundings. I pulled out Stas' business card and the driver dialed the number for me. Stas picked up and was on the way, so I thanked the owner of the phone with a "bolshoe spasibo" and headed out to the front of the terminal to await Stas' arrival.

We drove for about 30 minutes until we reached the home of Victor and Liuda Stamov, my home away from home in Kyiv. Victor is a world-renown F1A (tow-line glider free flight) pilot whom I have known since the 1998 Control Line World Championships which were held in Kyiv. Since that time Victor has visited California many times, often staying in my parents' home. Our families have become good friends, and it was very nice to be back in their home again after 8 years. Coincidentally, Victor left for a series of F1A competitions in California on the same day as my arrival, so we missed each other in transit.

Liuda provided me and Stas with a wonderful dinner that evening, after which we walked their dog (Atus) and passed out for some much needed shut-eye. The next day, Victor and Liuda's son Sasha took me into the city to walk around and see the sites of Ukraine's capitol. After another tasty home-cooked meal that night, it was time to get some more rest and then hit the road with Stas for Novomoskovsk in the morning.

The road from Kyiv to Novomoskovsk is about 500 km, and though maybe not as smooth or as wide as the Massachusetts Turnpike, really wasn't too much the worse for wear. Most of the way, however, the road was one lane in each direction, which

led to a few exciting moments passing by slow trucks.

An interesting thing that I learned about driving in Ukraine compared with driving in the US is that, while in the US I'm constantly on guard watching for cops and trying to avoid their attention at all costs, in Ukraine the police are viewed as almost as friends. Stas assured me that the worst that would happen if we were pulled over for speeding would be that we would have to give the cop \$5 and get back on our way.

When Stas and I arrived at the field, we immediately met up with Mike Willcox, Allen Deveau, Lester Haury, and Tom Skinner, my American compatriots who had arrived in Dnipropetrovsk the night before. We had each arranged to pick up 10 brand new Kolosov models at the field for use in the contest. This was the first time that I had ever tried to pick up brand new models on site, but the Kolosov models were of very high quality and required no de-warping at the field. By the time I got 4 models set up and engines mounted, the sun was already starting to set. There was just enough time to rush through testing all four of those models, and then head back to Samara to clean up for the pre-contest banquet. The next time I do something like this, I'll try to arrange to arrive a earlier in the day to allow more time for testing and settling into the lay of the land.

Back to the site, the field was well layed out with two official circles, each with concrete centers, a tent for contest management with a loud PA system that could be clearly heard from the center, a large net covering the spectator area, and a pit/line check area of ample size to set up probably about 10 matches worth of planes. On the down side, the terrain was quite rough in spots (my leg collapsed in a giant hole while running to a downed model in one match), and covered in some pretty gnarly weeds. As I quickly found out during our Friday test flying, the weeds were well adapted for making holes in Mylar.

That night there was a kick-off banquet in the hotel complex's party room for about \$16 per head. The tables were covered with plates of vegetables, grilled fish, preserved fish, and of course bottles of beer, vodka, and juice. A little bit later the main course arrived, which consisted of a chicken cutlet and potatoes. Curiously enough, this was exactly the one and only dish that our guys had been able to order (repeatedly) over the past two days from the hotel restaurant. Lester was very excited to see the traveler's Russian book that I brought with me, which included a large (illustrated!) section on food. Saturday night he used that book to order us up a tasty feast in the hotel restaurant.

The banquet ran until late in the evening with many toasts, party games that we could only half-way understand, and a live metal band on stage. Rumor has it that one of the American pilots took the stage for a special performance of "Girls Just Leave" by Fenway Park as well. Three nice young ladies with exceptional qualities were seated at our table, and we found out that they were scheduled to be the "trophy girls" for the competition. Their job during the contest was to hold up signs with the competitor's names before each match, much like at a boxing match. A great time was had by all, until eventually it was time to head back to the room and rest up for the first day of combat.

The pilot's meeting ("briefing") was scheduled for 8am on Saturday morning. Somehow none of our wake-up devices succeeded in getting us up until I heard a knock on the door around 7:30... whoops. We thought about trying to grab breakfast, but there was really only time to get ourselves up, collect up the gear, and make the 5-10 minute walk from the hotel to the field.

At this competition (as is the case with most contests in the former Soviet countries I'm told) the pilot's meeting was quite a bit more formal than at contests in the US. All of the competitors lined up shoulder to shoulder as we listened to the contest organizer open the contest. As the previous champion (I assume that's why, since none of us could understand what was being said), Mike was invited to raise the flags (Ukrainian and FAI) to officially kick off the contest. This was followed by the typical rules clarification type of discussion that we're used to in the US, with the exception that it took place in Russian. I'm not sure how "what if" is said in Russian, but I'm pretty sure that one guy asked if they were going to count all of his little cuts. Apparently they told us that breaking 90° on launch would be considered a maneuver and punished by DQ, though we didn't find that out until they thoughtfully demonstrated it for Lester in the first round. To his credit, Chorny did tell us after the meeting to be sure to take off straight, but I guess we didn't grasp the full weight of his comment.

Shortly after the briefing, the draw was posted and I was lucky #1 – first match of the contest. It was nice to be first and to get things rolling without too much time to sit around and think about what was to come. We had a pretty good match that looked like it was going to go to a 1-1 draw until my opponent ran out of gas with about 5 seconds remaining. Had he just glided down he probably would have been fine, but instead he tried to whip his plane for an extra few seconds and stepped out of the circle. Oops for him.

Because of the large turnout (65 pilots), the contest kept a fast pace and alternated between the two official circles with very little gap. We quickly learned that it was necessary to enter the circle and fuel up during the match before our own, otherwise the minute countdown would start without us. As Draconian as it may sound, sticking to a tight schedule like this really keeps the pace of the contest up and enabled us to fit over 140 matches into two days.

On Saturday we completed two rounds, which equals half of the total matches for the contest. At that point Mike and Allen were still undefeated, Lester and I each had one loss, and Grasshopper (Tom Skinner) was unfortunately finished for the weekend. That night we went back to the restaurant, had another Ukrainian meal that couldn't be beat, went to sleep, and didn't get up until the next morning. As hard as I tried to get an alarm set for 6am the night before, I woke up Sunday morning at 6:59, just in time to see the watch hit 7:00 and to realize that we had overslept once again.

There was no time for breakfast before heading to the field, but this time we were not afraid because we had already sampled the delights of the contest food tent. Off to one side of the pit area there was a cut-back in the trees that housed several tables with umbrellas and chairs, a tent selling alcoholic drinks, and another selling water, juice, coffee, tea, sandwiches, and shashlik (marinated, freshly grilled pork kebabs).

Mike and I both had tough third round matches against Nikolai Necheukin and Pavel Narkevitch, respectively, but both managed to pull through with wins. On the down side, Lester and Allen came out on the losing end of their matches. Things got worse for Team America in the fourth round, when Allen and I (both on the bubble) were matched against each other. It was an awfully long way to go to fly a guy who I grew up flying against in southern California, but the draw is the draw and we went at it full force as we've done so many times before. We had a great match which I won 2 cuts to 1, and for which I later received the "Korrektniy Boiy" (clean/proper) flying award.

The contest pushed on, and the field steadily began to thin out. Overall the quality of combat was quite good, and I witnessed many action-packed matches. There were a few flyaways (5 or 6 that I noticed), but I wasn't able to discern the immediate cause of any of them. I did notice the center marshal working hard to keep pilots together during line twists and to prevent pilots from jerking on the lines. It's hard to say whether or not this prevented any additional flyaways, but I think in most cases he acted within reason and had a positive effect on the fairness of the matches.

Eventually I dropped out in the 6th round under and episode of brain fade/communication breakdown, but Mike kept his momentum and posted his 6th win in a row. Only four pilots remained after the 7th round - Mike Willcox, Igor Fetisov, Olga Soshnina, and Stas Chornyy. After successive losses to Stas and Olga, Mike beat Igor Fetisov in a fly-off to take third place. The finals between Stas and Olga had to be flown three times until Stas finally got it right and took home the gold (in this case the first place medal was in fact real solid gold) with a convincing win.

The contest wrapped up with a very organized prize-giving ceremony. Prizes were handed out to the first through third place pilots and their mechanics. In addition to these prizes, three plaques were handed out for the "best match," the "hardest fight," and the most "correct flying," along with several others for the sponsors and volunteers.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to the contest organizers and volunteers who put this great event together. I would also like to thank Victor and Liuda Stamov for sharing their home with me, Stas Chornyy for his great help and generosity, and all of our other friends who helped 5 Americans have a great weekend of combat and fun in a foreign land.

When Mike and Stas finally lowered the Ukrainian and FAI flags at the end of the ceremony, the contest officially came to a close. Nobody wanted it to end, but that's the way they know that we will be back again.