

F2D News - November 2012

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Greetings from sunny Scandinavia. Winter is quickly approaching (is that turkey I smell?) and combat season has all but wrapped up for 2012. Unfortunately I wasn't able to make the season finale in Phoenix last weekend. However, last month I did have the opportunity to make a quick 24 hour stop in Massachusetts for the Wingbusters' F2D Fall Finale in Middleboro back on October 21. Actually, I should thank Neil for adjusting the schedule to help make that possible. It was really great to be back and to have the chance to see everyone again. And, as is always the case, it was great to have another day in the pilots' circle.

Shortly before my trip began, I received a suspicious package in the mail from Henning Forbech. Well, maybe it wasn't actually so suspicious, since I knew it was coming. What was in the mystery box? A whole lot of streamers were in the box. These were no ordinary streamers, however.

Before I continue, let me make a brief public service announcement. With 2013 quickly approaching, there are a few rules changes coming soon. Engine shut-off on demand has of course received the most publicity (more on this another time), but there is another change of which you may not be aware. Beginning January 1, 2013, the streamer dimensions will change. Under the new rules, the distance from the ink mark on the string to the knot of the streamer will be reduced from 2.5 meters to 2 meters. In exchange, the range of acceptable lengths for the paper will be changed from (2.25 - 3) meters to (3 - 3.5) meters. Essentially, the total length will stay the same, but the last 50 cm of string will be turned into paper.

Why change things? The hope was to increase the amount of flying and the number of cuts in F2D. There was nothing magic about the old dimensions. It worked, but typical cut counts have been rather low in recent years (how often do you see a match with more than 3 cuts?). We'll see what happens, but hopefully the result will be more exciting and higher-scoring matches. In principle, this may also reduce the number of reflies.

Meanwhile, Henning took this notion to its extreme. "Why do we need a long section of string at all?" he asked. "Why not just make a streamer which is all paper?" Rather than just sitting on the ideas, he made a large batch of experimental streamers (see <http://www.f2d.dk/equipment/streamer/streamer-10.htm> for pictures). Quality-wise, the streamers were quite nice. Each one came with its own built-in metal loop and a short segment of string (perhaps 0.5 m). This put the knot just a bit behind the tail of the model. From there, the paper extended roughly 5 meters, the former combined length of the paper and string. In addition, each streamer came with an extra short segment (0.5 meters?) of paper attached at the knot. The idea was that, if the long paper was ripped off at the knot, the short flag would remain. This would allow the action to continue, hopefully with more cuts being produced.

The prospect of flying combat with string-less streamers sounded a bit risky at first. Greg and I were both worried that, without a string to separate the score-able area from the model, the rate of mid-air would go way up. Neil was more confident, however, and said that since guys are aiming for the back anyway, it shouldn't make much difference. Or was it that he said that he was aiming for the noise...? We decided to go for it, and put the new streamers to the test.

After just one contest it's hard to make any definitive statements about the merits and demerits of these streamers. However, I can say that there did not seem to be any marked increase in the number of mid-air. Actually, in the end there was very little time spent where one pilot was trying to make a cut on a very short segment of streamer. Perhaps this is why we didn't see any difference in the number of collisions. It may also be unrelated, since another theory suggests that most mid-air occur when one or both pilots lose track of the planes. There were 2 or 3 matches in which one pilot scored 3 or more cuts, which I would say looks promising. On the downside, 5 meters of paper created some serious complications for mechanics. It was almost impossible to keep the streamer from getting wrapped up on legs, tool boxes, etc. It's not clear if it was just from the sheer length of the paper, or the fact that the string was so very short.

In the end I would say that these streamers were a bit extreme. They showed some potentially positive characteristics, if the apparent slight uptick in the number of cuts was a real effect. My feeling is that something in between, perhaps like the new 2013 dimensions, will be great. It's definitely worth further experiments.

That's all I've got for now. Happy Thanksgiving!