

F2D News - November 2009

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SPECIAL REPORT: Dnipro Cup, F2D World Cup, Novomoskovsk, Ukraine – Once again I dared venture across the horizon to the far-flung reaches of eastern Ukraine, handle in tow, to put my skills to the test against some of the world's top F2D pilots. As always, the trip was an adventure, with plenty of fun and excitement. The competition itself was quite good, and before getting into the details of my trip, I'd like to offer my congratulations to the champion, Pavel Narkevich, and my sincere thanks to the contest director Vladimir Shatkov, all of the judges and FAI jury members, and especially to my gracious hosts Victor and Liuda Stamov, and to Jeka and Marina for helping taking care of us and for preparing some very nice models.

In anticipation of a large turnout, the contest was scheduled to run for 3 days, October 2 - 5. To get there in time, I left Tuesday night, and arrived in Kiev Borispil Airport on Wednesday afternoon. As some may recall, last year my plans were severely derailed when Delta airlines lost my bags somewhere en-route to Dnipropetrovsk. This time I was more careful, and scheduled my necessary transfer in Zurich. If there's any place where you can trust that things will be handled in an organized and efficient manner, it's Switzerland. Anyway, it seemed to work, as my bag was waiting for me on the conveyor as soon as I got to the baggage claim in Kiev (this was after some delay at passport control where I had difficulty explaining to the agent the purpose of my visit. Note to self – next time write “sport” on the card and keep the hotel contact info handy).

After a brief stay in the airport lobby, I found my host Victor and we headed back to his place for a Ukrainian dinner that couldn't be beat. In general I don't usually like wine too much, but when I last visited their home 3 years ago we tried a bottle of Koktebel wine from Crimea, and I was very impressed by its drinkability. We tried another one this time, which was also quite good (as was the home made stuff from Victor's mom).

The original plan for Thursday was to head out in morning, make the 7 hour drive to the contest in Novomoskovsk, then assemble and quickly test some models before dark. Unfortunately, our start got a bit delayed and we hit the road around 2:30 pm. Eastward ho! The road was familiar from the time I made the drive with Stas Chornyy 3 years ago, though this time I stayed in the passenger seat.

Shortly before reaching Poltava (the city where we would turn to head south to the contest), we stopped at an awesome little traditional Ukrainian restaurant for dinner. Victor has driven that road many times on his way to Free Flight contests (it's something like the I-10 of Ukraine), and was talking this place up well before we got there (apparently it was discovered first by truckers, and then others began to catch on). Victor ordered a good selection of new dishes for me to try such as “kharcho,” a tasty Georgian-style soup, “cheburek,” like a gigantic fried wonton, and “Poltavskiye galushki,” a local dumpling-like delicacy. On the way back, we would stop there again with Valeriy Kramarenko (of F2C fame) and his wife for another delicious meal. They were really cool and fun people.

The road from Poltava to Novomoskovsk was very dark and windy, but eventually we made it to the River Samara, the contest site, and our hotel, “Osokory.” Jeka and Marina (our friends from the Aerolux model company) had fortunately already picked up Mike and Leonardo from the airport in Dnipropetrovsk, and checked us into the hotel. When we got in, they were assembling models in their room, and Alex Prokofiev's dad from Latvia was there helping install electronic shutoffs in Mike's airplanes. Marina made me some special new models with orange leading edges that looked really slick. I took them back to our room, and Victor helped me straighten warps and assemble tails, etc. By 12 or 12:30 things were in pretty good shape, so we set an alarm for 5:45 (I think) with the intengion of getting up early with enough time to eat and test fly before the opening ceremony.

Dawn was breaking when we finally got ourselves out of bed, but there was no food in sight in the restaurant downstairs. If the kitchen wasn't awake yet, we figured we might as well head to the field and try to put up some flights. Unfortunately, it started pouring rain, and, by the time we got to the car, thunder began to roll. Damn. We drove out to the field and circled around, but the thunder continued so we headed back to the ranch.

By the time we got back, the kitchen was awake. It turned out that we were supposed to order breakfast the night before (whoops). Fortunately they agreed to hook us up anyway. While we were in there eating, lightning

struck the hotel. It was super loud, and the place shook. I heard some kind of strange whirring noise for a few seconds after, which made me imagine a clock spinning around a bunch of times really fast. It would've been really cool to see something like that, but unfortunately it only played out in my mind. On the bright side, we made the right decision about not test flying. Plus, Mike and Leonardo were now awake.

After some tea, the storm began to let up a bit and we headed back to the field. We found some fuel and headed over to the practice area (weeds) to take some flights. The planes had some warps, but otherwise felt good. Very soon the opening ceremony began and we had to head over to the official area.

The opening ceremony was, as usual, a quite formal event. Pilots were lined up in a big row facing the judges. Many pilots had flags with them of their home countries or clubs (the Moscow Aviation Institute Aerosport Club team was well advertised). The field included a majority of pilots from Ukraine, but many others from places such as Russia, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Denmark, Great Britain, the United States, and Mexico. Many top Russian pilots (Trifonov, Faisov, Belyaev, Necheukin, Bolshakova, et al.) were sadly absent due to a scheduling conflict with the Cup of Russia competition. However, there were some Chechnyans on hand to round out the field of 83.

Equipment-wise, I didn't see too much new or surprising at this contest. Most pilots used Fora or AKM engines, with pretty standard looking props and airplanes. Importantly, I was very happy to see that the newly required shutoffs didn't hurt the attendance much. Similarly impressive, it seemed that the shutoffs performed quite reliably. Although the number of fly-aways was not too high to begin with, of those that I witnessed I think all but one resulted in quick, successful shut-downs. Fortunately, the model that didn't shut down was captured by the safety netting that covered the spectator area near circle 1. Chorny had a successful shut-down on a model that was pointing up when the lines were cut. It glided around for a long time, and eventually ended up high in a tree. Eventually the wind blew it down, where I think it may have put a fresh ding in Victor's car (sorry!)...

Friday we finished round 1 and part of round 2. We stopped shortly before my match, which meant that I would have to get up early to be ready on time Saturday morning. On the bright side, all my models were set up and ready to go, so there was time to relax for the evening and enjoy the banquet. You may find it odd that the banquet was scheduled for the middle of the contest. To be honest, I agree. If people are going to party and get drunk, it seems like the best time for that is at the end of the contest. We only live once though, so I went out and partied hard (minus the alcohol, which isn't unusual for me anyway). It was a great time, with good food, great dancing, and some completely unintelligible crowd-participation games.

Saturday we had a full day of combat, and made it through the end of the 4th round. Leonardo and I were still in, and would have the chance to aim for the title on the final day. Before heading back to the hotel, we had a great meal prepared for us on the field by Jeka and Marina. Jeka fixed up his secret recipe of marinated chicken, and Marina made her version of "tazik olivye," a traditional kind of potato salad eaten almost universally at New Years. Leonardo brought out some special hot sauce that kicked it up an extra notch (perhaps two notches, if you count the fact that we were spreading it on with a broken propeller blade...)

That night it got very cold. When we arrived at the field in the morning, the thermometer in Victor's car said 3 degrees Celsius (about 37 Fahrenheit). All these New England winters finally paid off. This time I was prepared (thermal undershirt, T-shirt, flannel shirt, jacket, and wool cap). Leonardo and Mike, who are less used to that kind of chilly weather, got hit by surprise a bit by it. As Greg Wornell and I learned from our attempts to fly during past winters, F2D engines can get tough to start in those conditions. They really need a lot of gas to light up, but just a little too much and they'll get flooded. Fortunately, I had a seasoned veteran, Andrey Kudinov, taking care of me in the pits all weekend. He's a very skilled and professional F2D mechanic. Unfortunately, though, I didn't close the deal in the air and took my second loss early Sunday.

Leonardo made it one more round, and then Team North America was finished. I got some petrol-like solvent (called "galoshka" according to Jeka, because they would use it to make their rubber soles sticky when putting them into galoshes) and cleaned up my models and engines. By the time of the closing ceremony we had packed up. After the flags were lowered, I said my goodbyes and hit the road with Victor and the Kramarenkos. It was great to see so many friends again, and sad to leave so soon. I hope to make it back again next year, and to see many of you next summer in Hungary!