

# PLANNING AND HOSTING AN ULTRALIGHT MEET

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To some, competing in a meet sounds intimidating and not appealing at all. USUA has developed a scoring system to recognize pilots when they participate in meets. Meets can be fun, safe, challenging and give every level of pilot avenues in which to participate. A system for scoring at meets is in place and working well from all indications from those who have participated. Great effort, time, and energy have been spent developing the present format to achieve these goals. Some events of the past favored ultralights with short takeoff and landing capabilities or those which could go great distances on little fuel. These events were, therefore, more of a testimony of the ultralight's ability than a test of a pilot's ability to fly, and predict the performance of his particular aircraft. My region, Region V, has now been utilizing this format for almost four years which meets the goals of fun, safe, challenging flying under different levels of meets for all levels of pilots. Whether you only wish to compete locally, at the state meet level, or at the regional level, there is a level that will fit your interest. The present system has undergone many evolutionary changes to arrive at the present format.

Well great you say! So how do we go about putting on an ultralight meet? First things first. Let me explain more about the various levels of competition, the recommended format, and the logic behind the system.

## **Getting Started - Hosting Your First Meet**

To hold your first meet, gather together five of your friends and one USUA Observer to observe, participate in, or judge the event. If you can't find an Observer, then call USUA and apply for your own Observer card.

You'll also need a judge or judges. Typically the judge scores the events, keeps track of the scores, and watches the time clock to make sure all the requirements are met. This person may need assistance in watching events such as the spot landing, limbo or other fast-paced events. Quite often a non-participating pilot or pilots who are competing and not flying act as great judges.

After the meet is over, the judge totals the scores and announces the results. Events for a typical local meet at this first stage might include a bomb drop, spot landing, limbo, bomb drop and catch, or a multitude of other events. Events such as ribbon cutting or balloon chases may not be the best events to start with because participating aircraft could exceed operational parameters of normal operation. This wouldn't be in keeping with the safety aspect that competition should promote.

Keep cross-country event flights short, and conduct the flights around the field. This way, spectators and other pilots can watch the events. Cross-country events such as a timed pylon race, an estimate of time for a three-point cross-country, poker run, or any other combination of events which are on the event menu are typical candidates for this level. The whole meet may last four to six hours, depending on how many people are participating.

The first meet will expose pilots to organized meets where they can learn that organized flying events can be fun. Also, the pilot skills utilized are quite often the skills needed to become competent, safe pilots. People get a chance to meet other pilots and learn from other pilots who operate their ultralights in a mature manner. The positive images generated by a smooth, safe competition is a reflection of all of us.

## **When You are Ready For More**

Now that you have one or more meets under your belt, let's move up the competition ladder. The basic format is the same. You again have a judge or meet director to call the shots and run the meet, and a USUA Observer. However, at this level you may have more events.

Advertising on the community bulletin boards is a good way to inform people in your area of the impending event. Call as many people as you can and let them know of the event and ask them to fly in. Quite often, many pilots just want to do some group cross-country flying and will come just to watch. Many times these pilots end up participating in the meet and find out it's fun. You now should have a good feel for how many people are going to show up from letters you or your club sent out, from personal invitation calls, and if it looks like there may be 15 or 20 ultralights you might even find a hot dog vendor willing to show up for just the concession rights. It helps to let these vendors know that you have informed the local newspapers and perhaps even the local radio station about the date and time for the meet. They are much more likely to show if they believe there might be a sizable crowd.

Back to the point, putting on a meet. Ideally, cross-country flights will be of a 30-minute duration or so. Select these events from the list based upon field conditions, participating pilots' skill levels, weather, and time considerations. Have your meet director select the events best suited for the particular situation, and ask him to mentally prepare a schedule for these events. Have him write them down and ask him to try and meet his projected time estimates for each event. Having these written down and adhered to makes things go smoother. When larger numbers participate, this scheduling becomes even more critical. As with the local meet, the judges score each event, keep score for the competitors, compute the scores and give awards accordingly.

A more advanced meet continues to develop participation in organized activities, promoting positive images of the sport of ultralight flying and assisting pilots to develop better piloting skills. How do these competition events develop better skills? Many of the cross-country events require each pilot to estimate their fuel burn for a given period of time while flying a cross-country course as well as estimate their respective flying times. Often at competition meets I have overheard, "I don't know how to do that." Well, these are basic operational skills pilots need for cross-country flying. Hopefully pilots will come away with the desire to learn to estimate these flight parameters for their daily flying activities.

### **Hosting a State Championships**

Ah, now we arrive at the *State Championships* which will determine the state champion! Don't be surprised to run across some serious pilots at this level. The honor of being the "Best" ultralight pilot in the state is at stake here and you may run across several "competition animals." Don't be intimidated. If you know your aircraft, you will do well. The key in ranking high is to participate in all events at this meet.

At this meet you will need one meet director, and two or three other secondary judges. The meet director's function at this level is to keep things flowing. The other judges will do things such as keep score, judge events, check fuel, keep time and perform other duties. Flying clubs in your state may want to form a state competition committee to decide things such as where to hold the meet, the time of the year to hold the event, which competition events to use, how to advertise the meet, arrange hotel discounts for out-of-town pilots, and other details. Since the state meet affects all pilots in the state, this committee is an effective way for all ultralight-active areas to have a voice in deciding details and begin developing a unified approach to organized activities.

Once the meet director, location and time are chosen, you will have a balance of two local events, and two cross-country events. The state championship will be decided upon a pilot's flying skill, so events like the short/short and circuit navigation should be considered. Cross-country events can be longer, at least one hour in duration, making them more challenging. Navigational points can be selected from an aeronautical sectional to test each pilot's ability to successfully perform a cross-country flight using a sectional. Exact measurements of fuel are important to score the competing pilot's fuel estimations. Don't be surprised to see individuals returning with only one or two ounces difference in their fuel estimations and only seconds off their time estimates. The choice of local events should be selected on the event's ability to be repeated at least two or three times. By

having two or three rounds of an event and then averaging the score, the elements of luck are alleviated. At this level it is important that the meet director adhere to the schedule. It is not uncommon to have 20 or more competing ultralights at one of these meets.

An outcome of a state meet is the determination of the five top-ranking pilots within the state to progress to the regional meet. These individuals will represent the most skillful participating pilots from the state. Honing one's flying skills to enhance flying safety for a state meet enhances flying safety. Typically this level of competition can be made as big or small as desired. The title of "Championship" will almost assuredly bring out TV crews if contacted. Many media contacts can be made to promote the event. If this occurs, two or three vendors like the Lions, VFW, and numerous civic clubs enjoy this type of chance to raise money for their club and will put out snack bars at no charge. If large crowds are expected, parking spaces should be planned, as well as sanitary facilities. This is also a perfect opportunity for you or the host flying club to earn money to assist in maintaining operations. Plan on selling tickets. Gate ticket sales typically are low but your club can pre-sell tickets and do quite well. These moneys can defray the cost of trophies, prize moneys, and operational expenses which are incurred hosting such an event.

### **Hosting A Regional Championships**

Well, we reach the *Regional Championships*. This event will be comprised of individuals who are serious about winning. This adds a whole new dimension to the competition. This is where you will see knowledgeable, skillful individuals with well-maintained equipment. You can feel the essence of competition in the air when it is time to fly. Others just as knowledgeable, with just as good equipment will also be present competing for the fun of it. Yes, even at this level the fun element has not been lost. That's one of the unique facets of these higher levels of competition.

Even though some competitors bring serious overtones to this competition arena, the enjoyment of meeting old friends, making new friends and yet competing against one another makes for special excitement for all who participate either in the air or on the ground. Each USUA Region is made up of numerous adjoining states. In my particular case, Region V is made up of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and my home state, Texas. As in the case of the state championship, I have found it desirable to develop a Regional Competition Committee. This committee's function is, as in the case of the State Competition Committee, to decide matters of competition in and for the respective USUA Region. The same questions are addressed, a meet director identified and secured, a location found, a date set, and a competition format mapped out.

The regional meet format again calls for a minimum of two locally based events, and two long cross-country events. The difficulty level of all events are high because at this level, it is assumed that all pilots have had prior competition experience, and that the best pilots from each representative state are there. In this regard, several pilots from each or at least one other regional state are present, and will qualify the meet as the regional championship. As with the state meet, the regional championship is to identify the three top individuals within the region who may progress to the highest form of competition in America, that being the United States National Microlight Championships.

It is essential that rules be clearly understood by all participants, judges, associate judges and all other people involved on the officiating staff. It is important that the judging staff be identified well before the meet. They can contact the meet director to make sure they know and understand all aspects of their areas of responsibility. Make no mistake, at this level of competition competitors will be knowledgeable of the rules, and will expect prompt answers to questions. They expect no favoritism to competitors, and they expect to win. Be prepared to defend all decisions. It is of the utmost importance that all rules be followed and that the rules be uniformly applied to all.

The meet director and staff will have a strict schedule of events, and all competing pilots are expected to promptly follow all directions. As is the case when dealing with men and machines, not everything goes according to plan. Having an experienced director handle

the problems which inevitably pop up during such an all encompassing meet can be a great help.

The facilities themselves ideally would have covered areas for competing pilots to perform last-minute adjustments on their equipment, even at night. Security should also be arranged, as well as food arrangements and sanitary considerations. If all this sounds too complicated, you do have the option of keeping things simple. At our last three Region V championships, we decided not to subject ourselves to the extra work required to accommodate the public and got together with an experienced meet director, knowledgeable staff, printed minimal rules, and had a good time.

The regional championships will have two local events and two or more cross-country events. Organizers should plan on having a three-day event. This allows 1/2 day for registering, 1/2 day for field preparation and competition practice. Allow for 1-1/2 days of competition, and 1/2 day for closing the event. Don't forget to clean up your mess.

The local events should be those which require the utmost pilot proficiency, and at least three rounds of each event should be planned. My favorites are the 1,000-foot engine-off spot landing, and the precision touch and roll. Both adequately test a pilot's ability to judge landing conditions and simulates forced landing circumstances. The selected cross-country events should be at least 1-1/2 to maybe 2 hours estimate time and/or fuel burn of their respective aircraft. As in the state meet, navigational points should be selected from an aeronautical sectional. Many combinations of navigational events can be selected from the current Event Menu. Select the ones which best suit the time, weather, and field conditions existing during the championships. However, remember the underlying aspect of safety. Don't map out long cross-countries over hostile terrain if it can be avoided. Try to select routes near highways or roads for retrieval of downed aircraft if needed. Above all else, plan and keep track of all competitors.

There are many other considerations when dealing with competition. What about the FAA? I have had competition experience in many parts of Texas, Louisiana and Florida. In most cases the FAA was notified and informed about the competition. In only two cases do I remember them showing up, and when they did, they were there only to observe.

In cases where the competition is near a FSS, call them and post a NOTAM concerning the flying activities expected. That is all you can do in that regard. It is suggested that everyone who operates an ultralight-type aircraft adheres to all applicable FARs. However, in hosting an ultralight meet, it is not the function for the organizers to become ultralight police. Adherence to all federal laws is the responsibility of each pilot. Remember, one of the reasons to host a meet is to get as many individuals involved as possible, to enhance pilot skills and to have a safe, organized flying event.

For those of you who want to experience the joy of organizing, hosting, judging, and competing in a meet encourage your club to organize one. Once you have completed your first meet, you might realize that competition need not be complicated or intimidating as you might have previously thought. Try one and see!