



ONTARGET

BY PAT CANNON

Yes Sir, Mr. Director, Sir!

One of the great myths of ballooning competition is that the competition director is the devil himself and that his call of tasks for a championship event was born in you know where. Indeed, there are times when I have looked at a multiple task sheet and wondered if the guy who wrote it was in his right mind. In the long run, and certainly after running the tasks, it becomes pretty clear that the director, with a great deal of help from the staff, has constructed the most challenging task for the day, based on a number of factors.

There is, of course, a great deal of difference between the task structure of a local festival, largely attended by pilots who compete for fun, and those that are conjured up for a National or World Championship. The difference lies in the complexity. This complexity is governed by a number of different elements.

The weather plays a big part of it, because the larger the turn of wind direction with altitude, the more options available to the director. If the winds are fairly straight line and the speed less than five or six knots, the tasks will be simple and fewer. If the winds vary more than ninety degrees and the speed increases with altitude to more than twelve to fifteen knots, almost any task in the book can be run and don't expect to have less than three to cope with.

The topography plays almost as big a part. There may be certain flight directions that may not be fit for certain types of tasks. So, while wind variations may make it possible to fly a large downwind wedge, the topography may make it inadvisable. A good example of this would be a wind directional change of more than sixty degrees in the first three thousand feet, but turning toward congested airspace or areas covered by trees. Calling a land run task or maximum distance task, which may cause the competitor to fly high,

might put the competitors and the successful completion of the task, in jeopardy.

Another element is pilot qualification and experience. If this is a local festival competition, you want the pilots to fly over the areas where spectators are located. That is often going to be the main launch field or festival area. If you make the task too difficult, or if you try to add tasks to the beginning of the flight with the main launch field being the second or third target, it may be more difficult than lower time pilots can handle. This may cause many pilots to miss the field altogether.

The last area of major importance is the window available within which to run the tasks. A forecast for wind increases on the surface within one hour of sunrise would make it inadvisable to try a three part task unless the surface winds are at least six knots and the upper wind speed are over ten to twelve knots. The steer would need to be more than ten to twenty degrees. Even with these conditions, competitors will probably be landing in a high wind.

The job of the competition director is to make the competition as challenging as possible, without violating the boundaries of good judgment and reason. He or she takes into consideration the four primary areas listed above when making the decision about what tasks to run and how to run them.

Now, your job as a competitor is to try to take into account as many of the elements listed above as you can when looking at the task sheet. The best competition pilots will develop a feel for the conditions from which the director will have to make the decision. This comes primarily from familiarity with current weather trends and surface weather and wind patterns that are consistent to the area. It also comes with familiarity with the entire flying area. In some cases, it may also



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be familiarity with the personality and background of the director.

Let's look at these elements. If you have made the commitment to visit the location of the National Championships prior to the event or for some period just prior to the event, you will have built a database of information as to the local weather trends.

You will probably become familiar with the surface wind trends and how long after sunrise wind directions begin to change or deteriorate. You will have flown the upper winds a couple of times, or at least looked at the upper wind forecast on a number of sequential days. But, there is no substitute for setting your own tasks and flying both high and low levels, to learn

the constant weather patterns for the area.

Additionally, as I have mentioned before, you have probably driven the entire map. Yes, I know it consists of almost 1000 square kilometers. It takes several days to cover the whole area. However, if you are trying to pick a target for a pilot declared goal, that is the third task for the day, you must be familiar with the terrain in the area of the target and what landmarks can be seen from the air.

As for familiarization with the championship director, certain directors like certain tasks and will call them whenever they have the opportunity. It will be guesswork on your part, but if you are familiar with the weather and terrain, you might just

outguess him. There is a certain amount of satisfaction in receiving a four-part task sheet that contains no surprises. It will also boost your confidence.

Lastly, when you receive the task sheet, you must be able to look at the whole picture as it relates to the competition map. This is when it becomes so important to have your map properly marked with sufficient target choices and information. With this information, it shortens the time necessary to choose pilot declared goals, which are the backbone of most of the tasks in any large championship event.

Even tasks like the land run are based on the competitors choice of a pilot declared goal, sometimes as far as ten or twelve kilometers

away. The wrong choice brought about by lack of preparation and knowledge of the area, can be the difference between 950 points and 450 points.

Looking at the task structure for any event is not brain surgery. It really is what I have been saying in almost every article, hard work, dedication and preparation for the event. With these items, even the devil himself can be beat.

Next month, we will fly a four-part task with changing winds and weather patterns, and evaluate the in-flight decision-making that takes place.

