

Reflections From a New Competitor

Typically, my rocket building interests center on old sport clones, perhaps an interesting futuristic model and most of all, trying to improve on my paint finishes. Competition has never really popped up on my radar screen. But the PSC has a great attitude about competition and I was starting to think that perhaps I might be missing out on some of the better club experiences. So I decided that it was time for me to give this competition thing a try and jumped into the PSC's latest NAR section contest, "Reach For the Sky XIII". It had to be an interesting experience as not only would this be my first serious attempt at competition, but in some of the events it would also be my first attempt building and flying these particular types of models.

With the time I had available leading up to the meet, I managed to prepare at least one entry for all of the events except C HD.

Random Duration:

The first event was Random Duration. Steve's hot hand turned up a target time of 60 seconds with the lucky die. For reasons that are less clear now, I chose to fly one of my newly crafted B Streamer models with a 5 x 50 streamer on an A3-4T. With a 5 mph wind, I should have made a 58 - 59 second decent with this particular model. But instead, I DQ'd due to a separation (shock cord burned through).

What burned me about this outcome is had I flown just a regular sport model and parachute (which anyone can do), I at least would have had a qualified flight! Experience (or is it common sense?) can be a tough master.

½A Boost Glider:

This was my first BG attempt, both as a competitor and as a sport flyer. The model I used was

OCR's Never Loop design, and on the whole, I was quite pleased with the performance of this first try. The Timers recorded a flight time of 30 seconds before they lost sight of the model. Unfortunately, I couldn't find the glider for a Return and I didn't have a backup, so this event was incomplete for me.

A Flex Wing:

My first ever Flexie flight took place on Saturday. I had prepared two Flexies for this event, having built each one with the techniques Rod presented at the PSC Flexie seminar held in February. I was fairly pleased with the result, as the Timers recorded a

flight time of 2 ½ minutes before the Flexie went out of sight. It was not returned. We also couldn't find the booster, so I couldn't take my second flight until I built a new one.

Overnight, I built a second booster for the following day. Using an A10-3T, the model boosted perfectly but unfortunately the flight was DQ'd due to an inadequate glide (the Flexie did not fully deploy). The failure was due to some slight melting of the Flexie wing material, likely caused by an inadequate amount of wadding.

There was a small consolation for me nonetheless, as one of the guys, John Sarosi, happened to find the booster I had lost the previous day. Thanks John!

B Streamer:

I had prepared two models for this event. The first model was optimized for the Apogee B7-6 motor. The maximum streamer I could fit into this thing was a 5" x 50". The first flight occurred Saturday, but the flight was just a little too good: we soon lost sight of it and I was marked on this attempt as "Track Lost".

My second attempt took place on Sunday using my back up model. Thanks to some tracking powder loaned by Steve, we were able to track this one perfectly, but again, misfortune befell me. I suffered a separation, this time the culprit being a weak attachment point between the shock cord and the streamer. Time to surrender - I was out of ammo.

Conclusions:

Well, I was right about one thing: I would have missed out on a great experience had I not participated. Overall, I felt my results were promising; a couple of changes in technique and a few more backup models could have made a big difference in my score. However, for a new competitor such as myself, the real prize wasn't the Flight Points, but the experience gained and the lessons learned. Participating in this event gave me a much better appreciation of reliable technique, of redundancy and of Murphy's Laws. And along the way, I got some valuable advice from the experienced competitors that I'll be able to use next time.

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