

Hot Air



Message from the President

February 2016

To say the weather is unusual is an understatement. The high pressure that is sitting over Southern California is keeping the El Nino at bay. However, we have been sitting on the edge of several storms that have passed just north of us. The result has been many days of light wind with the occasional blast blowing through. A good example is the storm that just went through with little rain and gusts over 50 miles per hour. The weather has been good for the guys flowing electrons through motors. Not so good for glider jockeys. Stay tuned, we are still supposed to see a bunch of water when the high pressure breaks down.

The AMA convention was dominated by multi-rotor aircraft. Camera-carrying and racing quads were in abundance. There were booths with ARFs that demonstrated the continued improvement in quality, lots of foam. Not a whole lot for the kit builder, however. Soaring USA had their usual display of imported molded composite ships, always impressive. I understand the convention is a reflection of the hobby in general, but it would be better, in my opinion, if the displays were more diverse. The convention seemed rather repetitive.

There has been nothing from the City of Torrance that changes our status at Entradero Park. My recent inquiries regarding a new leaseholder for the field has only resulted in requests to keep the gates locked. Rather than report on the rumors I have heard, I'll hold off until I get something official from the City.

The AMA was unsuccessful in obtaining an agreement with the FAA for all RC pilots that would allow for our AMA membership being accepted as FAA registration. The deadline was the 19th of January. Registration on the FAA website was pretty straightforward and cost five dollars. I would recommend registering if you haven't already done so. Registration lasts for a few years. Remember to have your contact information, AMA and FAA number on your plane.

Cross your fingers regarding the weather and we will try the following dates for our Fun-Flys. The Del Cerro Fun-Fly will be this Saturday, February 6th. Guys usually start arriving around Noon. Be extremely careful walking on the trails and cliff if you need to recover a plane. The date for the Entradero Fun-Fly will be Friday, February 19th. Flying will start at 8:00 AM. This is our first Friday Fun-Fly as weekend baseball is starting up.

Once again, try to help keep the gates lock at Entradero. Enjoy the fields and I hope to see at the meeting or out flying.

All the best,
-Jeff

Next Meeting

**Wednesday,
February 3rd**

**La Romeria Park
7:30pm**

Upcoming Fun-Flys

Del Cerro	February 6th
Entradero	February 19th



Through the (F3F) Looking Glass

by Steve Kratz

The 2015 So Cal F3F season wrapped up with a finale at iconic White Point in San Pedro on Sept. 27th that saw all the usual suspects show up to settle old scores with fellow competitors and try to bag some last minute points to consolidate their positions in the SCSR standings. This was the conclusion to a long and eventful season that frankly ended a couple of crashes too late for yours truly. More on that later.

This season started with the usual hopeful optimism and bold predictions from the F3F sages about who would win this year's points championship and which newcomers to keep an eye on. One of the most exciting bits of news was the re-opening of the fabled Grass Mountain site which had been closed for 2 years due to fire danger. I had never flown this site but had listened in awe to the stories told by the veterans describing an almost mythical place where big air rules and planes are routinely swept away over ridgelines never to be seen again. While there was no mention of dragons or sorcerers in these stories, one got a sense of mysterious forces at work that would punish any pilot foolish enough to challenge the mountain gods in their throne room.

Into Thin Air

After reviewing the 2015 SCSR contest schedule, it was clear that the local F3F community had developed a serious case of Grass Mountain mania with no less than 4 contests scheduled there. My record at inland slopes is not something I'm proud of and while I have occasionally laid down a fast time at some of these inland monsters, I am much better known for breaking planes in wildly creative ways.

The season's first contest was held at Point Fermin. However, in the pits the buzz was all about the next round at Grass Mountain! So I found myself driving out to Grass Mountain with a knot in my stomach, in route to a date with slope racing destiny.

"Ghost planes litter the landscape and rogue turbulence hurls planes to their doom"

The veterans' words echoed in my head as I drove the several miles up a sketchy fire road to the 4500-

ft summit of Grass Mountain. Upon reaching the summit, I parked, jumped out and anxiously surveyed the landscape. My first thought was, it's big, real big. My second thought was I should've brought more planes.



Tough Crowd! Grass Mountain veterans scrutinize every flight.

After organizing my gear, I assembled my race plane and powered up. Might as well get the first launch and flight over with before I chicken out. One of the Grass Mountain vets, offered to launch my plane and talk me through my first flight which I happily accepted. He began with some pre-flight intelligence on how to climb out for a race start at Grass.

"You're gonna launch and fly between those trees way to the right and keep going until you hook up with the House Thermal out over that valley. It's going to grab your plane and pull it up as high as you want to go. Then all you gotta do is turn back this way and dive unto the course. Got it?"

Wow. Over time, I've learned to accept whatever wisdom the grizzled veterans are handing out, since they're usually right, but my brain refused to accept what seemed like a half-baked plan for certain disaster. As I was mulling over what he could possibly mean by "house thermal", a bystander asked me whether my plane had a camber setting. I responded with an enthusiastic "Yeah, sure!" Unfortunately my would-be mentor interpreted this as the signal to launch and with a jovial "Here we go!" my plane was suddenly airborne. The plane



wallowed through the thin mountain air to within inches of the slope as I frantically fought to keep it flying.

“Camber! Hit the camber!” Flicking the camber switch bought me just enough altitude to avoid the dirt. *“Go right, go right!”*

As the big 3-meter glider slowly picked up airspeed, it gained a couple of feet and I was able to maneuver it in a mostly northerly direction towards the all-important gap in the trees. 85 ounces of lumbering carbon fiber were now hurtling towards the dense forest. I could see that the plane’s trajectory was going to send it through the gap in the trees, but with almost no slope lift, the plane was following the curvature of the summit slope and would shortly be gone from view, out over the abyss, into the valley beyond. *“Let it run, just let it run!”*

Panic began to overwhelm me as I fought my natural instinct to grab a bunch of up elevator and try to break out of the tree line. Paralyzed by indecision, I watched helplessly as my beautiful glider accelerated out of sight below Grass Mountain’s northern shoulder, seemingly into oblivion. @#%^*! *“Pull! pull up!”*

Startled into action, I nudged the stick back and suddenly, miraculously, my plane reappeared, rocketing skyward like a hotliner under full power. *“That’s the house thermal! Stay with it, Turn, turn!”*

I spiraled up at an impossible rate as if some supernatural hand had grabbed my plane and was dragging it into orbit. I had never seen lift like this before! Whether it was actually a thermal or some strange wind anomaly, I can’t say, but I became an instant believer in the Grass Mountain mythology. Extraordinary things really do happen here. *“That’s high enough. This ain’t a thermal contest”*

Within seconds, the big glider had become a mere speck in the sky so I broke out of the lift and commenced a downward trajectory back towards the race course. A faint whistling could be heard as the glider’s velocity rapidly increased. The whistle grew into a pronounced shriek as the plane screamed through the course at supersonic speed. It became

crystal clear that Grass Mountain can indeed generate ridiculously fast race times.

“Get that thing on the ground! Pilots meeting in 10 minutes.” A couple of shaky landing attempts finally resulted in success with my plane safely on the ground.

During the pilots meeting, I learned that flying beyond either the east or west ridgeline, as I had just done, was extremely hazardous and not recommended. Likewise, I was informed that attempting to climb out through the trees (as I had also just done) was equally unsafe. A sideways glance at my erstwhile mentor provoked only a guilty smirk as it became clear that I had just barely survived a genuine Grass Mountain hazing.

The actual contest proceeded as anticipated with me struggling to find the nexus of lift and flight pattern that would result in fast times while avoiding various obstacles such as corner pylons, trees and the ground. My wild aerial gyrations incited a free fire zone of advice from the veterans delivered at maximum volume and with no attempt at civility.

By the end of the day I had bagged a solid last place and both I and my plane had survived an epic day of flying at Grass Mountain!

Of Tourists and Palm Trees



Launching at White Point!

As the race schedule took us back to the more popular and forgiving coastal slopes, I was definitely getting into a groove and even won a round from



time to time. I had achieved a slew of new personal best times and placed 3rd overall at a marathon 3 day event dubbed the “Surf and Turf” that started and ended at Pt. Fermin, but included a day of competition at Grass Mountain in between. The GM contest was a qualified success for me but did include some drama when my plane got blown over the top of the mountain and out of sight. An anxious search located my plane on the ground amongst a dozen parked cars without a scratch on it. Some more Grass Mountain Magic!



“Do not hit a palm tree!” Warren Day gives last minute advice before launching a competitor’s plane.

In fact, the season was going really well for me up to this point, until a routine race at Pt. Fermin turned ugly. The early rounds played out as usual with me steadily ramping up the ballast load on my Pike Precision as the wind and lift increased. I’m pretty conservative with adding weight to my plane compared to some of the other competitors, but with the wind really howling I boldly decided to match the front runners slug for slug on my next run. With a plane full of lead and a powerful throw from Warren “The Godfather” Day, I got a great start and laid down my first sub-40-second round of the day. It felt great being right at the head of the class and as I made my way through the painstaking Fermin landing procedure I was convinced that I was on the cusp of my first contest win. Little did I know that’s as close as I would get this season.

Less than a minute later, I was standing atop the ridge bringing my plane in, flaps down, committed to land, when I was suddenly swamped by a busload of tourists. They swarmed into the landing area like a herd of wild bison and I had to make a split-second

decision to stuff it in the dirt or attempt to go around. Grudgingly, I wheeled away from the unsuspecting tourists and tucked the flaps up as the now very sluggish glider protested with a death wobble. There was just enough residual airspeed to get the plane out over the front side of the ridge and gain some wiggle room to maneuver. Ever so slightly, I kicked in some rudder as the airspeed built, taking the plane across the wind and out over the dreaded Fermin parking lot. Normally a “No Fly Zone” due to the vicious rotors, this time the turbulence worked in my favor and bumped my plane up giving me another 20 feet of precious altitude. My odds were improving fast as I successfully got the plane turned downwind with it still flying.

I began to relax a little and was looking forward to having this drama behind me when it happened. My plane was arcing gracefully towards the landing zone one second and then it was spinning wildly towards the earth. It wasn’t until I heard a loud crack as my plane impacted the ground that I realized I had hit a palm tree! A @#%*^ palm tree? I walked slowly down to my crumpled plane, picked up the wreckage and trudged back to the pits, a broken man. The icing on the cake was when I plopped myself into my beach chair only to have it collapse and dump me onto the grass. I was out of contention and relegated to pole duty for the rest of the day.



Up and Over! My reconstituted Pike Precision back in action @ White Point.

What followed was almost 2 months of online searching and social networking for spare parts to repair my badly damaged plane. I found some parts



but between the expense and the delivery times required, I was struggling to justify the effort. Here is where the tight knit F3F community came to the rescue with some fellow competitors negotiating part prices on my behalf and others offering to repair my plane for free. A really great bunch of guys! But most of all they admonished me for my self-pity and encouraged me to do whatever it took to get back in the game. With some donations of Kevlar cloth, a handful of purchased parts and an unwieldy Rube Goldberg alignment fixture I eventually managed to cobble my plane back into flying condition. It no longer looked pristine but the battle scars gave it a certain gravitas.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

The season finale played out at White Point, which is a site I'm familiar with and whose unique combination of cross winds, asymmetrical slope and limited access tends to level the playing field for an F3F competition. Another feature that makes this place popular is the 1.5 acres of plush green grass to land on. No fence jumping, road crossing or trail hiking here, no sir! Just launch, fly and take 5 steps back to land. Ironically, this place has seen more broken planes than any other SoCal site, due to the unpredictable ground turbulence caused by various out buildings upwind of the landing zone.



Close up F3F action in the narrow lift band at White Point

As luck would have it, I was making my debut as Contest Director at this event. It's hard to imagine a more thankless job than CD, except perhaps IRS auditor. Fortunately, the normally tough crowd was gentle with the rookie CD and even drafted a

spectator to run the timing gear all day which made my job a breeze. I was flying well, considering I missed several contests without a plane and was within 1 or 2 seconds of the winner in each round. After loading up on ballast and taking advantage of a sudden cycle of great air, I resolved to push hard for a round win.



Warren Day shows flawless form in route to a contest win and the SCSR 2015 Championship

However, fate had a different plan in mind and as I pulled up into a soaring climb during the start, I watched in horror as my plane nicked one of the majestic palm trees overhanging the cliff and cartwheeled through the tree tops like a giant scythe before disappearing into the jungle like foliage below. Only the ocean breeze and the crashing waves broke the profound silence as I took the walk of shame to retrieve my plane.

Back in the pits, I slumped into my beach chair feeling drained while several competitors quickly disassembled my plane for a damage assessment. Parts were passed from hand to hand and meticulously inspected. Incredibly, the final consensus was that with the exception of a small bite out of the leading edge, my plane was unscathed.

"Tape that ding and get ready for the next round. You're up!"

Still slightly dazed from the extraordinary turn of events, I flew my fastest round yet during the last minutes of the contest to score an unlikely 3rd place overall.

The 2015 season was a roller coaster of ups and



downs for me. I had left behind my status as semi-newbie racer and soldiered on through some morale-sapping adversity to find, on occasion, I could hang with the big dogs. My obvious Achilles heel was the lack of a competitive back up plane. This needed to be rectified before I could start looking forward to a 2016 F3F campaign. Fortunately, I lucked into a great deal on a new Pike Precision that will be my back up plane.

My goal for next season is to win a contest, which will be very challenging, since most of the SCSR events will include at least one US F3F team member who will be honing their skills for the 2016 World Championships in Denmark. See Ya at Del Cerro!

- Steve Kratz



My 2016 F3F tool box includes a spare plane!

The Raptor Approach to Drone Control

You may think you've seen everything, but you've got to see [this!](#)

Membership Reminder...

If you've not already done so, please renew your membership. You will find the 2016 membership package on the [website](#). You can send your renewal directly to John Spielman or bring it to an upcoming club meeting. Thank you!

Club Officers and Volunteers for 2016

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| • President: | Jeff Chambers
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