

GORDY'S TRAVELS



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What Gordy's Travels Have Really Been About? RC Sailplane Zen!

If you have been following my column, you notice that I seldom (maybe never) did a travelogue type of article. Not, "Hey it's great flying in Utah, or Kentucky or, well, anywhere else." Rather, my column exposes and discusses new products, plane equipment. They include discussions centered around philosophies on building, setting up, trimming, balancing, launching, flying and landing RC Thermal Duration Contest sailplanes.

Oh sure, I travel with my sailplanes more than anyone else on Earth, fly 'em more, and fly more different kinds of sailplanes with more great, smart RC sailplaners than anyone else on Earth, unless there's someone that I haven't met. Someone that does as much flying and traveling that I do. I suppose even I didn't realize where the title of my column was going to take me when I stumbled into it. I figured it was just a logical title since I 'travel' a lot.

Although my RC sailplane travels were originally going to be about location, rather they become a chronicle of my journey of understanding of the hobby. Sort of the *Zen* of RC Thermal Duration Contest Soaring and Sailplanes, if you will.

As most of you may have noticed, I am NOT a science guy. Me and equations just don't get along. For me to 'measure' or calculate a 'CG' is a totally alien concept. The idea of having any flying model 'teeter' on some pegs, at

some measured point, just drives me nuts.

Over the years, having flown with hundreds of RC Sailplaners of varying experience, skill and savvy, I've noticed lots of things that most would never consider. For instance, skegs and dork landings make perfect sense for thermal duration contests, but not for 'soaring'. Having weird, comical or trick landing targets are fun and exciting for TD Contest pilots, but for soaring guys they are an insult.

TD Contest fliers have been referred to as "Elitists" by some. We fly super expensive sailplanes, with the most featured filled radios, and pay ridiculous prices for servos. We balance our planes so that they are virtually uncontrollable (according to 'soaring' enthusiasts) yet have the most control over every aspect of their flights and landings. We get up at ridiculous morning hours to travel hundreds of miles in the rain, with confidence that once the pilots meeting is over, the sun will shine and the lift will be great. We pay ridiculous amounts of money for our sailplanes, then do everything we can to abuse and damage them. And can't wait for the new one to become available.

But what TD Contest pilots really are is 'Measured'. We don't go out on a Sunday to simply float around. We never just land the sailplane somewhere. Every flight is measured precisely, with a clock and a ruler. The goal? To walk onto a contest field, receive and accept the tasks assigned by the director, and to head up to the winch with confidence that we have done the things necessary to prepare ourselves for this moment. Then, proceed to see if, in the end, we did enough preparation.

TD Comp sailplanes aren't about soaring, they are simply tools for the tasks assigned when we show up at a contest. There is nothing more fun than putting in a day of just soaring, *once you have TD precision sailplane control and skills.*

IF mathematically figuring the aerodynamic CG is important, RC soaring pilots and TD guys would bother, but



Photo taken at the Cincinnati Great Pumpkin Fly October 2003. Gordy Stahl, Saturday Champion Unlimited, flying a Pike Superior.

they don't; it's probably safe to say that you never have and neither has anyone else, that actually flies TD. IF you were to set up a plane with that spot, the wing would lift to its optimum, but the sailplane would fly terrible. You'd see the point soooo many guys that get in the hobby miss: our planes have to be *avoptimized compromise* of all the factors that make up a RC sailplane. This only applies to RC Thermal Duration Contest Sailplanes. Why? Because it is the only place where it all matters, and the only situation where it will be tested, measured and graded.

I recently participated in a ten minute fly off challenge against two pretty darn good 'soaring' guys. The goal was a precision 10 minutes, no landing points but the plane had to be in a 20' landing 'zone' in order for the flight time to count. These guys were on their home turf and had great TD ships, which were pretty much the same as mine. The first guy went up and didn't find great air, coming in about 20 seconds short, but making the landing zone. We all launched within a minute or so of each other so we were in similar air. The next pilot didn't find great air but was doing okay. I launched and went to boomer air that I recognized from my 'experience' and it was clear 10 minutes wasn't going to be a problem. The second pilot came over to join me. His time was about 15

seconds off of 10 minutes but his landing was about 3' short. That left everyone to watch my landing. My timer was instructed to give me every 5 seconds when I had one minute left on the clock, then at 30 seconds, every second. I told him that I would have my plane crossing my right shoulder at that 30 second mark and then at 20 would make my final turn to line up with the tape, just as I had practiced a hundred or more times. I wasn't nervous because I was prepared. My sailplane's nose touched down right at 10.00 minutes, with the fuse laying in-line and right on the tape.

Why? For two reasons. I had my sailplane set up for TD contest work and two years of never flying without a countdown watch going, a landing procedure and a target to put the nose on. After your 'tool' is tuned up, then it's all you. It's not airfoil, construction, wing span, or tail configuration. Only with disciplined practice can you ever take advantage of those things.

What follows is a story that might explain why it's important for newbies to get involved with the League of Silent Flight achievement program and how it can make our 'sport' grow. For all the effort, time and money, TD must be the MOST fun of all the rest of RC soaring or so many guys wouldn't be having so much fun at it! Don't get me wrong, not everyone should be 'pushed' into TD Competitions! But they should be moved along in ways that advance their confidence, control and understanding, or they won't stay involved. LSF slowly allows them to work, practice and learn, all the great fun things that embody Thermal Duration Contest Soaring.

Read on, laugh and learn!

Interrogation of a Sport Soarer

(An imaginary story from the daydreams of a soaring enthusiast!)

I flew a contest in St. Louis and got into a discussion with the club president about why lots of guys show up if they call a 'fun soar' day, but not many show up for contests.

I knew why, but heck it's just my opinion, so I asked him who would be a representative 'sport soarer' in the

club. He told me and I got the guy's address. I proceeded to head over to the guy's house only to find him cutting the grass. I snuck up and bopped him with my Super Stand pole, then stuffed him in my truck. I got to the motel, I tied him to a chair with wing tape, then took off his shirt and applied the new really aggressive hinge tape, that I got from Don Richmond at Visalia, all over his hairy chest and back.

I brought him back to reality by spritzing some CA Kicker under his nose and began my interrogation (for an RCSD article of course), asking the same question over and over adn over, again...

WHY DON'T YOU FLY YOUR CLUB CONTESTS!

And, I wasn't too pleased with his response.

"I'm not interested in competitions..."

Yep, I could see it was going to be a long night before I'd make it thru the usual canned 'reasons'.

RIPPPP! I pulled off a piece of tape.

"YEOW!!!!" He exclaimed.

"It's too much stress!" *RIPPPP!*

"No full size plane sticks its nose in the ground for a landing." *RIPPPP!*

"I don't need to prove anything." *RIPPPP!*

"It's not 'fun'!" *RIPPPP!*

"Cuz I don't own a stop watch!!!!" *RIPPPP!*

I finally ran out of hinge tape, and I considered clipping pieces of carbon pushrod to use under his finger nails. I was close to him finally fessing up with the truth... It was getting late and I had an 8:30 pilots meeting the next day so it was time to get serious, and pull out all the stops. Yep, the one thing that will break any sailplaner...

I reached for his wallet...

"Okay, Okay!!!! I'll tell you why us sport soarers don't come to contests. It's because we aren't PREPARED! We never practice. Heck, we aren't sure how to practice! When we come to the

field, we don't have a talking timer to count down specific amount of minutes of flight time, and we never have a target to land at. SO, when contest day comes up we aren't comfortable suddenly being expected to control the sailplane on purpose! We just aren't prepared and that makes us feel like we aren't welcome. We love to fly and want to fly every opportunity. We want to join in the fun those contest guys seem to have! We just haven't practiced and don't have the confidence to feel we belong."

Now that I had him talking, I couldn't get him to shut up...

"When I turned 16 there were 8 of us in our town who went down to get our drivers licenses. When we got there, there was some government guys there who separated us into two groups. I was in the 'Sport Drivers' group of four, the other group was called the 'Elitists'."

"Those poor Elitists really got screwed! Us Sport Drivers were taken to a 100 acre driving area that had no obstructions and was surrounded by thick soft rubber bumpers. The instructor assigned us each a car, showed us how to start it and make it go, but that was it. He may have mentioned something about a 'brake', but there really was no need. Mostly all we had to do was to stay away from each other. IT was a ball, we could drive anywhere, any way, fast or slow. On weekends we'd go out and drive around for hours on end; we'd do circles and figure 8's, and pretty much just drive around. It was great, and we did it for about 2 years. Near the end it got kind of boring."

"The Elitists had it really bad. They had to go to classes, and were forced to place their hands on certain spots on the steering wheel. Even had to shift their hands in a certain way when turning. They had to drive in skinny lanes, and could only drive one direction in certain lanes, too. And were restricted to specific speeds, as well. Uck! Seemed like a lot of work for nothing."

"The instructors would make them do really hard boring stuff over and over and over. Things called U-turns, Y-turns, parallel parking. Then even made them back up with trailers hooked to their cars. As the 2 years went on, the Elitist group was made to

do more and more boring and scary stuff like driving in rush hour traffic with lots of other cars packed in really close, and driving really fast on freeways. Or drive downtown and park in really tight spots. (We couldn't figure out why they would bother with stuff like that, since mostly all we did to stop was just let the car coast till it stopped somewhere on the driving area. Sure, it was a hassle cuz it could be a long walk back to the entrance, but it sure was a lot easier than what those poor Elitists had to put up with. Imagine this! Their driving area had lots of weird obstacles called stop signs and stop lights, and their instructors would make them practice making their cars stop with its front wheels on a thick white line, EVERY TIME. And if they missed it they would get penalty cards called 'tickets', which they had to pay fines for!"

"While we got bored with driving near the end of that 2 years, the Elitists were soooo brainwashed by the government men, that they couldn't wait for the next driving class. They'd actually run to get there!"

"The abuse to the Elitist group didn't stop there. Their instructors even had them doing math. They'd have to figure out how long it would take to get from one place to another, traveling at specific set speeds which only varied pending on signs posted along the way."

"Anyway, near the end of those two years, us Sport Drivers pretty much hardly ever went to the driving area. Sure we had fun driving around with no rules, no requirements, and no need to fine tune our control, at least for a while."

"Little did we realize the atrocity of the diabolical evil of this government experiment. But that wasn't to be revealed till just before Senior Prom..."

"This gorgeous girl who I had been in love with since grad school came up to me and asked me if I would take her to the prom. She said she planned on having all the fun that was the stuff of dreams! However, she'd only go with me IF I agreed to drive her."

"How could I? I mean, I had never had to keep my car in a lane, or at a specific speed, and what would happen if I had to do one of those parallel park

things and ended up smashing into something? I couldn't bear the pressure and possible embarrassment. I just wasn't prepared!"

"I told her, thanks for offering, but I was only a 'sport driver - I just do it for 'fun'. I couldn't admit that I wasn't prepared..."

"She ended up marrying one of the Elitest Drivers."

I Woke Up!

It was at this point that I woke up! Such a sad story! But it gave me a few ideas that I wanted to share with you.

Club Leaders, here's one secret to increasing club participation. Start holding club 'clinics'. One night offer landing classes. You know, the 30 second pass over your shoulder, 20 second turn on approach, then work the 'throttle' to a spot. Make it fun, offer rewards for best averaged score for the month of clinics! Vary the shape of the landing zones. Heck, assign each participant the duty of coming up with a different zone for each clinic.

Set a night of time flights, where each participant alternates as a timer and a pilot. Same sort of reward thing for best average precision time for the month of clinics. Take some of the club money and get some cheap stop watches for the clinics. Issue each participant monthly clinic score cards. an example. You always fly with a clock, and always toss a hat or put down a tape.

Help your members learn to control their sailplanes, and maybe they'll be part of those *elitists*, the guys who have so much fun in the hobby that they get up at 5 am to drive hundreds of miles in the rain to make a 9 o'clock pilots meeting to find out that the landing is a crazy shaped spot and the time tasks are all minutes plus seconds, in a weird add 'em up of a limited number of flights. Who have so much fun that even after losing a \$1,000 plus plane, are on the phone that Monday ordering another. And a week later back on the phone threatening the supplier that if the plane doesn't show, he's going to expose his lousy service on the RCSE,



shaking in the throws of TD withdrawal symptoms.

Build your club by helping sport flyers learn where to *place their hands on the steering wheel*, and how to launch with their left hand, while keeping their right thumbs on the control stick. Teach them launch techniques, and coach them in the logic of 'there is never a good reason to have a downward component of a thermal turn! They're supposed to be falling UPWARDS.

A great way to build up club contest participation would be to call a Tom Hoopes Pro/Am Contest. Assign an experienced contest pilot to a less experienced one, a month early. That way they can fly together and the more experienced pilot will be able to mentor the other. They will build team spirit and learn to time for each other. Or, create other fun ideas that will promote 'on purpose' control and activities.

After all, you don't want the girl to run off with someone else! Do you?

Hope you had as great a 2003 as I did! I have a feeling my travels through RC soaring are just getting started!

...Damn, I forgot to untie that guy when I checked out... Oops! Maybe I'll untie him in my next dream?

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