Proposals for CIVL Plenary Meeting 2003

Objective

The objective of these two proposals are for the CIVL Plenary Meeting 2003 to implement the proposals written in bold type below.

The following shall be applicable for a CIVL Category 1 paragliding event:

1. **The wing used by any participant shall have either DHV or AFNOR safety classification. The wings shall be flown as certified and can not be changed in any way in its configuration. Proto types are not allowed.**

2. **Pilots flying a wing classified as AFNOR Performance, DHV 2-3 or lower, also compete in a sub-category called the Serial class. Separate prizes shall be awarded to the winners of this sub-category.**

The above shall be implemented from the start of the 2004 season. It is recommended that 2003 is a trial year, and that the organiser of the World Championship 2003 post separate results for the Serial type wings and present separate prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place among pilots flying this type of wing.

The sub-category shall be adapted to the CEN standard for wing classification if and when a CEN standard is internationally recognised.

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Background

There are two main reasons for these two proposals:

Safety is a priority

International paragliding competitions today are highly dangerous for the participants. Several fatal accidents and accidents with serious injuries have happened in recent years. A large percentage of the accidents happen because pilots fly wings they are unable to handle in the conditions they encounter along the course. This can not go on. Competition paragliding is a sport where the performance of the main equipment, namely the wing, is inversely proportional to the safety. A minimum standard of built-in safety should be required of the wings used, and the level of safety must be suitable for the experience of the pilot.

It is generally accepted that AFNOR Competition / DHV 3 classified wings require that the pilot regularly flies in the order of 300 hours minimum a year to maintain the experience necessary to control this type of wing with an acceptable level of safety in competitions. A large proportion of the countries participating in Cat 1 events have climatic and geographical conditions where even their best pilots have no chance of accumulating relevant air time of this magnitude. Nevertheless, some of these pilots fly these high performance gliders because they want the benefit of maximum performance to be able to compete with the rest on equal terms. They are forced to take an unacceptably high risk. It is a well-known fact that some competitors will reduce their inherent safety if they believe that is the way to beat the rest. Needless to say, they crash, hurt themselves and damage the reputation of our sport. This is clearly undesirable. The implementation of a Serial Class will most certainly rectify some of these serious safety problems in Category 1 events.

A minimum level of safety can not be ensured in proto-type wings. The current rules of letting manufacturers guarantee the safety for their factory pilots have proven insufficient. These pilots still crash due to loss of wing control. Proto-types should obviously not be allowed and have no place in a Category 1 event.

In the last CIVL bureau meeting this matter was discussed and the minutes under **§ 9 Serial class (PG) and the purpose of safety and training committee** says:
" ....The Bureau has the feeling that there is a safety issue and we strongly urge a motion to deal with this problem....."

Fairness

From the argument above it follows that the wise pilots of less than professional experience must chose to fly a glider with added built-in safety, and consequently with less performance. It is clearly unfair that these pilots are forced to compete with the better performing wings that are too dangerous for them to fly in a competitive manner. Implementation of the Serial class as a sub-category will enable less than professional pilots to compete without the handicap of lower performance. Regarding proto-types: It is not fair that a few pilots are allowed to compete with equipment that is unavailable to the rest.

Comments to the proposals

Classification

Manufacturers of paragliders can choose to have their paragliders tested, categorised and certified accordingly by a small number of recognised testing institutions, all currently using the German DHV or the French AFNOR standard. The tests are designed to establish the wings built-in safety and ease of flying. Potentially dangerous situations are provoked during these tests, and category given based on the wing's ability to return to normal flight. It is a sad fact of paraglider design that high level of performance is linked to low level of built in safety (ability to return to normal flight) and vice versa. The actual performance of the wing i. e. speed, glide ratio etc., is not used for classification. AFNOR classify wings as Standard, being the safest, Performance and Competition. DHV uses five categories from 1 to 3 (1, 1-2, 2, 2-3, 3) with 1 as the safest. Non-certified wings, either because the manufacturer chooses not to have the wing tested, beacause the wing fails the tests, or because the wing configuration has been altered since the certification, are called proto-types.

During 2002 we have made an inquire among all major paraglider manufactors, asking them how this with a Serial class would effect them and how they look upon the matter. A great majority answer that they fully support the creation of a Serial class.

FAI / CIVL codes and classes

Paragliders are currently classified by the FAI Sporting Code as class O, Hang Gliders and Paragliders. Section 7 defines sub class 3 for paragliders and sub classes 1, 2, 4 and 5 for different types of hang gliders. Notice that hanggliders have three different classes (no. 4 is not used in todays competitions) that originally came out of the same reason as we now are facing.

According to General Section, a Category 1 champion is awarded in each class. One alternative would therefore be to define two classes of paragliders, just like hang gliders are defined into four classes. This would mean paragliding competitions split in two. We do not think that such a division will be advantages to the sport. In order for FAI to declare a World Champion in a sub-category like the Serial class as defined in this proposal, this sub-category must be recognised, in the same way as Female is a sub-category today. The CIVL Bureau has indicated that a split of Section 7 into two unique and separate sections dealing with hanggliding and paragliding is upcoming. This seems like an excellent opportunity to make sure that a World Champion can be declared also for the proposed paragliding sub-category. In any case, such necessary specifications for safety and fairness in our sport should be implemented, even though some of the bureaucratic hurdles may seem complicated. The close connection between wing performance, safety and required level of pilot experience is a justified example of where a sub-category is required to improve safety and fairness.

We intend that the proposal shall be mandatory for Cat 1 events. In order not to double the amount of participants in Cat. 1 events, the same qualification criterias as today should be used and each country has the same amount of places as they have today, independent of whether the pilot uses a Serial type wing or not.

Organisers of Cat 2 events can choose to include the Serial class, or even limit the competition to Serial class only. World records should still be recorded for one common class of paragliders, as should team scores in a Cat 1 event.

Control of classification

Section 7 regulates this in 5.13 and 5.19 today. Only certification from a CIVL-recognised test organisation should be valid. Strict rules for classification and a requirement for manufacturers homologation stamps on the wing or certificate will prevent 99 % of the pilots from cheating. There are measurement methods today, where a verification of single gliders conformity to its respective certificate can be performed on the hill within 30 minutes.. In any case, we cannot delay implementation of this proposal due to uncertain methods of inspection. We will certainly find ways to make it difficult for those few who want to cheat.

PWC

The Serial Class has been tried in PWC without complete success, and then abandoned. We believe there are two main reasons:

- The Serial class was introduced by PWC without support from CIVL. The Serial class was therefore not universally recognised. Even though PWC has abandoned the concept, more and more countries are taking it up as a separate category in their competitions. The concept of a Serial class wing is gaining wide recognition among pilots, and it is has become part of the vocabulary in magazines, test reports as well as competition results. We are quite certain that a large percentage of the pilots will choose the safer Serial wings if recognised in Cat 1 competitions.
- PWC is a professional circuit with individual qualification requirements and probably a higher general level of experience than a Cat 1 event. A higher percentage of PWC pilots are probably qualified to fly the High Performance gliders, and therefore do so.

It is not the intention of this proposal to influence the PWC format.

Serial class experience

Several countries, including Norway and Sweden have had Serial class competitions for several years. The experience is that the safety has been markedly improved and the rate of accidents/incidents and reserve deployments have dropped significantly. At the same time we have noted an increased activity and interest in competition from our pilots. The fun factor is high and the terror factor is low.

Take responsibility in promoting safety and fairness in our sport.

Vote YES on these two proposals.