

WIAC - World Intermediate Aerobatic Championships 2025 Hungary.

Many lessons learned, while having much 'fuun'.

I'd long thought of entering an international competition but until this year had not bitten the bullet. But as I saw the World Intermediate Championships were going to be held in Hungary in September I decided to go for it. Life is short - if you have any aspirations at all of entering such a competition then I'd advise to go for it, you won't regret it for a minute.

First things first - I entered as a Kiwi but live in the UK. Why not enter as part of Team GB? Well long story short is that I tried to do exactly that but was 'mucked around' by the selection committee to the point that it was June before I was told they had decided they were not sending anyone for Intermediate. The other option I had was to enter as a Kiwi, something I'm glad I did and was proud to represent NZ on the World stage.

Many thanks to Maurice Tull for his enthusiasm and encouragement, also thanks to Andrew Love for sorting the membership quickly and Liz King for furnishing me with an FAI license in double quick fashion so I could meet the deadline for entry.

The 'paperwork' was fairly straightforward, nothing too demanding there. The cost to enter (are you sitting down?) was €3,500 Euros with approx a further €2,500 in expenses (getting there and back and extra accommodation for practise week, transport, food etc). Giving a total all in of approx €6K = \$12k NZD.



Following the Rhine river eastbound after just entering German airspace.

Getting there, flying across Europe, 4 countries in 2 days, 8hrs each way. Luckily there was a High pressure that developed over most of Europe so I had good weather the whole way out. Leg 1 was straight across the Nth Sea to Midden Zeeland (the original Zeeland!) for customs then onto Paderborn in Germany for an overnight stop. The next day I set off for Vienna where I had a fuel stop and lunch with a friend who lives there. Then it was just a quick hop of 1 hr down to the final destination in Hungary. Heviz Balaton airport. An ex-Soviet military MIG fighter base with it's massive 2.5km long runway. Complete with crumbling hardened aircraft shelters and many old accomodation blocks now all deserted. It's now an International airport but has very few movements so we mostly had the run of the place once the comp had started with only the occasional interruption for an airliner or air ambulance flight.

An option was to arrive 5 days before the comp started and take advantage of the opportunity to have practise flights in the official box. I think you'd be crazy not to take advantage of this no matter how much practise you'd done beforehand as there is nothing more helpful than to fly in the actual box and get your sightlines sorted.



The 'venue' Heviz Balaton airport and Lake Balaton (Europes largest lake).

Having never flown in a fully marked out box before my first impression was "damn this box is small!".

10 minute slots were allocated on a first come first booked basis. This was all done online and you could only book 1 slot at a time. As soon as you'd flown that slot then you could book another one on the following day.



A good view of the Box. Damn it's small!

4 practise flights were available in all, as one day was weathered out. I chose to fly for the 3 different Judging positions that were to be used, gaining valuable knowledge and sight pictures for each. I then used the last practise to fly my FreeKnown - something I always do before a comp - as I don't want my brain to be 'scrambled' by an UnKnown practise with the possibility of transposing a figure from that Unknown into my FreeKnown.

During practise week, in between flights, there was time a plenty so I took the opportunity to visit the two main judging positions (the Southern position being inaccessible). I'm so glad I did this as it was extremely valuable to see what the Judges would see. The East position was very close - illegally close as it turns out - by 20 metres. It should be a minimum of 150 metres from Centrebox but it was 130 metres so I'd have to position slightly further away than normal. The opposite was the case with the West judge position which was at the outer limit of 250m and was also set on a downslope which changed the view as it made the aircraft in the box appear to be lower than they actually were.



The opening ceremony. Each country had a local in traditional dress as their flag bearer.

With 18 different nations entered from both Inters and Advanced it was to be a truly international affair.

What were my competitors flying? The next-worst performing aircraft to mine had 3 times the power and 4 times the roll rate. I was really going to be up against it. Not a single Pitts in sight - let alone a Cap 10 (my Twister has an even lower performance than the Cap 10). Perhaps there should be a limit on what can be entered for Inters? Or handicapping? It works for Gliders so why not for Powered Aerobatics? It has sadly become an 'arms race'.

The Romanians were out in force with 8 pilots entered. They are a professional team - state sponsored, arriving with a fleet of six Extra 330's, mechanics, a coach and if that wasn't enough the Warmup pilot for Inters was also a Romanian, which I found a little unsporting. So considering the machinery I was up against, on

paper I should finish dead last. Let's see if I could improve on that...

In true Kiwi underdog fashion I would have to channel my inner Burt Munro. As it turns out earlier in the season I also made an 'Offering to the god of speed' when I suffered an EFATO. The culprit was a Piston which had cracked clean in half. This put me out of the air for a good portion of the season missing a comp and training as a result while I rebuilt the engine.

With 70 pilots entered and a potential 4 sequences for each that would mean 280 flights in 6 days. 2 of which were half days and 2 of which we lost to bad weather. By my calculations we would not all get to



Team tents with flags up

fly 4 sequences - so would there be a cut? As it turns out the organiser decided that rather than a cut we should all fly 3 sequences.



My Twister and some of my competition. The weather was like this for most of the time with only the odd day rained out.

The comp started on Saturday 13th with the 38 Advanced pilots of the concurrently run WAAC going first. It was going to be a long wait till Monday afternoon before I'd get to fly. In the meantime the organiser had started the process of figure selection for our first UnKnown. This now meant my brain was getting scrambled with new figures and sequence designs while it should only be thinking about my FreeKnown. Something I had not experienced before. In the bigger teams this is not an issue as all of this stress and work is taken up by the coach, leaving the pilots to rest and focus on their next flight.



Sequence design begins. I was lucky to be able to add a figure in as priority it given to the bigger teams first.

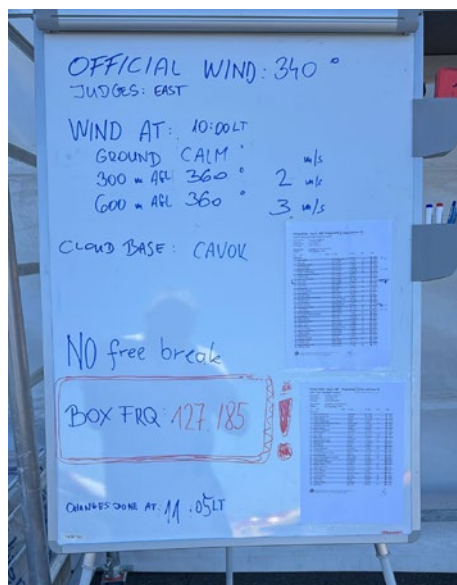
As an independant you have to attend every briefing and do everything for yourself so this automatically puts you at a disadvantage to the bigger more well equipped teams.

Finally it was time to fly my first competition flight, the FreeKnown. So how did it go? Well it was hot, 28 degrees which is a real performance sapper (especially noticable in an underpowered aircraft) we also had a significant off judge wind, so my positioning wasn't the best. I felt I'd flown it as well as I could and managed to score 70%, not bad.

Tuesday was more Advanced flying and Wednesday we lost to bad weather. So my second flight, the first UnKnown, took place on Thursday. As I was mid pack in the flying order for the first flight I was moved around and was now at the very front being "Pilot 3" for this flight. At the briefing I was given a surprise when



Beauty and the Beast. I had to fly against that Sukhoi!



Typical briefing board with flying order and wind information.

it was announced that they would be using the Southern Judging position (for the first time) as they felt the wind would swing round to the West as the day went on. Well for us first up it was very much a Southerly wind so very off judge for us early runners. Although the rules say a minimum of 30 mins must pass before the first flight after the briefing, it still felt very rushed having to redo all the sightlines in my head as well as prep the plane and get ready. I'd planned on the Judges being to the East as they were every other morning - especially with the wind being mostly from the South as it was that day. The flight itself felt like a disaster while I was flying it as I ran out of energy - got too low. Aerobatics is Type 2 fun - you hate yourself at the time but afterwards on reflection can feel not so bad about it :) I was dreading the scores but again I managed to score 70% so felt ok about it afterwards. Note to self - start higher!



Welcome to the candy shop. 2 hangars like this packed full of aerobatic throughbreds (and my Twister).

Finally it came to the last day of the comp and my last flight, the second UnKnown.

If there is one thing I could take away and improve from this whole experience is that of sequence design - how important it is to have that skill set. I know I don't have it and so my design for the final UnKnown made for very poor positioning. With my lowest score of just 65.7%. This hurt my overall average and led to me finishing the comp in 23rd place, from 32 entered. Still, I wasn't last and I'd beaten 9 others in vastly superior machinery.

The main thing was I hadn't got any Hard Zeros and I'd learnt so much along the way which is all you can expect from your first international.

As I said at the beginning if you have any aspirations of competing in an International then I highly recommend the experience.

Videos of my 3 flights on these links:

Known: <https://tinyurl.com/3fmcjbb9>

1st UnKnown: <https://tinyurl.com/2bw937tk>

2nd UnKnown: <https://tinyurl.com/mruts2tn>