

Judging Insights by Stuart Mellor: “A View from the Chair”

Hi All

Following are a few thoughts on my judging experience down the years. (Other opinions are available) May be of use to any potential judges and at least I hope it doesn't put them off.

Purpose of Judging

The purpose of judging is to find the winner by scoring manoeuvres in a set schedule and place other competitors in correct order of merit, based on the ground rules laid out in the Sporting Code.

The scores you award are for that purpose primarily and a secondary use is for pilots to achieve their own targets. i.e. a promotion score in the introductory schedules or an indication that their flying is improving or perhaps to achieve a consistent '400' flight in FAI - which is considered a benchmark/milestone and a good flight.

Read the Sporting Code which sets out in detail what to look for, - but don't be too worried about the latest S.C. refinements in regard to downgrades for new set distances or worrying whether the radius of a loop is identical to the last, say. The latest refinements are for the most experienced judges – but may not affect the final results anyway since the majority of points lost are in basic errors.

Take a seat

Sit down initially with judges or directly behind as the best way to 'see' a flight properly, is with the judges. You won't properly see any flights from a distance as perspective will distort it. Don't be afraid to ask why they awarded a particular score, after a flight, whilst the judge can still remember, that is. You can also download the scores with an app on your mobile phone.

Format of UK-F3a Competitions

The majority of UKF3A competitions take place on one day, mainly on club sites or BMFA Buckminster. There's bound to be a competition near you! There are also two and three day competitions e.g. the BMFA Nationals and UKF3A Championships. The competition calendar is published on our website and in the BMFA News magazine.

One day competitions usually comprise three flights of each schedule, details of which can be found on this website under 'Schedules'. The winner of a particular class (schedule) in one day competitions is always decided by adding the best two flights from three to find the final score..

Some basic things to look for

99% of points are gained/lost as they always were and a brief summary is below. The Sporting Code scoring method is based on downgrading single elements of manoeuvres - starting with 10 and deducting points with a minimum deduction of a ½ point per error.

Are vertical lines truly vertical? Are roll(s) in the centre of the line? Are loops round with the same start and finish height? In knife edge or point rolls are wings vertical and more importantly – the start and finish of every centre manoeuvre should start and finish at the same height and heading.

Concentrate on the basics initially and you will definitely place the competitors in the correct order - but again refer to the Sporting Code for appropriate downgrades.

You will probably be nervous and make mistakes, in the same way that pilots make mistakes. That's normal and you need to make mistakes to learn. I was more nervous when I started judging than when flying. There are close parallels between flying in comps and judging and the associated learning experience. Pilots will understand this and will be grateful that someone is prepared to give up their time and learn.

P.S. If you are already competing and have been promoted to the next class, you will definitely be able to judge the previous class!

Track of the model

The track or direction of flight of the model is through the Centre of Gravity (CG), not where the nose of the model is pointing. Not much practical difference in calm weather but, in windy weather the fuselage may be cranked over at an angle - it's the flight path of the CG that determines the line of flight for judging.

Notaumatic Scoring system

The Notaumatics are hand held push-button units that automatically send scores to a central computer/database and have transformed scoring. They are easy to use and tell the judge the next manoeuvre via headphones and won't allow you to move on to the next manoeuvre until you've entered a score. A manoeuvre description can be repeated and the final scores are also printed out by the unit automatically at the end of the flight. A major advantage of the system is that scribes are no longer required to write down scores, freeing up pilots and the C.D.

(Scribe – judges assistant who manually entered scores on a score sheet.)

Before the Notaumatics, all scribes 'judged' sub-consciously whether they wanted to or not and thereby gained judging experience, however this is still possible with Notaumatics.

There are several no-consequence ways that **you** can have a go at judging, without worrying about influencing the results:

Spare Inactive Notaumatic The scorer should have a spare unit that can be set to inactive mode for your use – i.e. the scores are not transmitted or used but can still be printed out for your convenience after the flight. You might then want to compare your scores later with the official judges scores, either through the app or when the full competition results are published on the UKF3A website.

Scoresheets An alternative way to score is by using the old manual score sheet method for that particular schedule and write down your scores. Spare score sheets are always available on the day. You will notice that every mark awarded is multiplied by a 'K' factor, depending on the difficulty of the manoeuvre, to give a total score for that individual manoeuvre. Again, you can compare your scores later with the official results as before.

Spare headphones It is technically possible to sit with a judge & simply hear the judges scores in real time as he scores each manoeuvre. It requires a personal set of headphones with a 3.5mm jack and also a 3.5mm headphone Y lead splitter with 2 of 3.5mm sockets. The splitter lead simply plugs into the Notaumatic and your headphones plug into the spare 3.5mm socket. UKF3a may be acquiring some splitter leads to enable this facility in the near future.

½ Point Scoring

Introduction of the Notaumatics also coincided with the introduction of Sporting Code ½ point scoring of individual manoeuvres. There is also a function built into the units that allows the judge to deduct continuous ½ points according to the observed downgrades. At some events you could hear all the clicks as the judges were deducting points! I tried the facility but have now abandoned it as I found that the resultant score was inevitably too low and the rule is you cannot add points according to the Sporting Code.

So, my technique is to mentally note all the errors and finalise the score before inputting it. Probably the best technique also for beginners and you might find whole number scoring is better initially. Don't forget though, that some big errors call for much bigger downgrades than ½ a point. Again, read the Sporting Code.

Scoring a specific manoeuvre

Score out of 10 as you see it! I might be stating the bleeding obvious but some time ago there were suggestions that judges should use the 'full box' of scores. This would mean exaggerating scores to artificially increase gaps between competitors scores. My advice is - don't do that – always give the score as you see it.

Sometimes you won't be able to decide between two scores, say 6 or 7. It's difficult to score accurately

to 1 point anyway, so award 6 ½. That way you will only be ½ a point away and reduce any possible error in your score.

Judging Beginners

You might want to try and treat beginners more kindly, with probably more generous scores than the higher classes. **Yes** - you can still fulfil the original judging purpose of finding the winners, however, and more importantly is the need to encourage people to keep entering the comps and improve - so no need to be harsh.

Zeros

Sooner or later a pilot will perform a potential zero OR the manoeuvre will be so distorted you cannot properly score it. If you are convinced, then zero the manoeuvre – BUT do not be afraid to consult with the other judge if you are unsure. If you are lucky the other judge will indicate a zero to you immediately via a hand signal (or a 2!). What is paramount here is that the pilot receives the correct score. This is crucial with only two judges. A 'zero' discussion will only be possible after the flight – again no problem - the scorer can modify your score via the software if required. After the flight, the other judge may convince you it was your mistake if asked, or vice versa – it has happened to me several times and we have modified our scores accordingly.

Halo Factor

Does it exist? i.e. potential bias shown to a well-known competitor. Of course it does! The good judge will try not to be influenced – but yes, it's more difficult when a World Champion is next on the flight line and not expected to make any mistakes. Even ex UK Chief Judge Pete Cappleman might have straightened his tie.....

Consistent judging

I like to judge all three flights of a particular schedule for several reasons:

By observing all an individual's flights, it's possible to properly assess any consistent errors and pass on that information if asked. This would not be possible if judges are changed for each round.

Also, judging and flying naturally become more accurate and consistent as the competition progresses. Scores will also improve due to the pilots and judges becoming familiar with the site and boundaries. Again, judging consistency would be affected if judges are changed between flights.

You will also find 'hard' & 'easy' judges in aerobatics and your scores may be different to a fellow judge. This will not matter if your scores are consistently higher or lower than the other judge - the overall results in all probability will still be correct.

Skin Try to develop a thicker one. That also helps :)

These are just a few of *my* thoughts only and probably will not be shared necessarily by any other judge. That is probably good. In any case, every judge will 'see' and interpret errors in a schedule in a slightly different way and we always need a balance of views, if we are to improve.

As a judge *you* will have the best seat in the house and the benefit of seeing all the flights. No one else has that privilege. It's a good place to be!

Stuart Mellor