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U.S. Soaring Team Day Reports & Results

2006 FAI Grand Prix

St. Auban, France, September 2 - 9, 2006



Tuesday, September 5 - Day 3

John Good Reporting -

Unfortunately, this will be a brief report, due to some computer problems I've encountered.

We woke to a very hazy morning that really didn't look like it could lead to much of a soaring day. At the briefing the task called for a journey north into the high mountains near Briançon. The forecast said that pilots who could make it there would find good cumulus clouds and lift to perhaps 4000 meters. In view of some rather optimistic forecasts of the past couple of days, I'm not sure many pilots took much stock in this.



The launch didn't offer a great deal of encouragement. It was supposed to start at 13:45, but was postponed several times due to the inability of the sniffer to climb above a pitiful altitude. It was hot and hazy. As against this there were some undeniable cumulus clouds visible well to the north.

The launch finally got underway at 14:30, and pilots had less difficulty climbing than in previous days (starts here have been troublesome, as a look at start penalties will disclose). Most pilots were off in a tight group - the first time this has been so.

The first leg was challenging for nearly everyone, as was apparent to spectators watching the tracking displays. The orthodox route to Briançon follows valleys and requires no amazing altitudes - just as well in view of the rather modest climbs pilots were able to find. But the second task leg headed west over some very rugged ground, and the predicted 4000m would be none too much for comfort. No pilot had seen anything better than 3200m short of the area near Briançon, and it was looking like they might be facing a struggle to get home.

Doug Jacobs was the first to connect with a strong climb, on a ridge about 7km south of the turnpoint. It started slowly, but developed well. Several other pilots joined in the fun. By the time they were

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done they'd reached 4700m (over 15,000') and were high enough to glide around the final two turnpoints. It's great to be able to simply enjoy spectacular view of the Alps, without having to worry about how to get home.

Despite doing more than his share of the work on the first leg, Doug unfortunately had a couple of bad breaks. The first was a lack of flaps - these are what you need to optimize performance at the kind of speeds you'll be flying when gliding home from mega altitudes. He finished fourth, but probably would have been second had he been flying a Ventus (with flaps) rather than a Discus.



But worse was to come. For no reason that anyone can explain, he suffered near-simultaneous failures of both his primary and backup flight loggers. There was no power failure - other instruments kept on working. Yet both GPS devices lost contact with the satellites and did not re-acquire them for the remainder of the flight. He has a slight hope remaining: the tracking device may keep a position log. It will take technical help from the manufacturer to transfer this to a computer; we won't know until tomorrow if this is possible.

Yet this is a low-key contest and by dinner time the Team Jacobs mood had recovered a bit. It was a communal dinner tonight featuring couscous, and was simply delicious. There's a lot to be said for a small contest where you can get to know most of the others. Our neighbors tonight were Eric Napoleon (he landed out today, but didn't seem greatly troubled by this) Didier Hauss (he won the day) and Tilo and Katya Holighaus (along with the 3 Holighaus kinder: Felix, Amelie and Charlotte). A hot day leads to a pleasant evening, made memorable by good food and friends.

- John Good