

## THE SECOND EUROPEAN FAI F3C HELICOPTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

### BLAGNAC-TOULOUSE, FRANCE

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by Horace Hagen  
Member FAI Jury

I found out about this Championships at the April 1986 FAI CIAM Plenary meeting in Paris. Mr. Guy Brouquieres, the competition director and a member of the organizing committee, asked the subcommittee chairman about candidates for the FAI Jury. Mr. DeProft asked me if I would be interested and after Mr. Brouquieres mentioned that they would share in the travel costs I volunteered my services.

During the month of June I received a very attractive brochure containing all of the contest details from Mr. Brouquieres. At this point I started to make arrangements for my trip to France. I also decided to combine this trip with a mini-vacation to the Cote D'Azur (French Riviera) with a friend from Germany.

I traveled to France on September 23 and arrived on the official practice day. I had been told by the organizers that the weather is quite pleasant this time of the year. When I arrived the weather was less than pleasant with temperatures hovering around 60 degrees and a light rain interrupting the day. At the flying site I met Francis DeProft (chairman) and Tony Aarts the other members of the FAI Jury.

I was not very impressed by the flying site because it was located on a former disposal site. The site is the regular flying field for the "Mini Ailes Blagnacaises" model airplane club. My disappointment stemmed from the fact that I had been a member of the Jury at the first F3C European Championships in 1984 in Eibergen, The Netherlands where the flying site was first class. However, when one considers that this flying site is near a major city like Toulouse, the club is very lucky to have this site available to them.

The flying site was well prepared for the competition. The FAI course was placed on an asphalt surface strategically placed on the field. A judges stand, complete with a tarpaulin shelter, was also erected according to the rule book. A crowd control line was in place and the organizers had provided two very large tents, one to shelter the pilots and their machines and one to serve as a field restaurant where lunch and dinner would be served each day. The organizers made a big mistake by not providing sanitary facilities. This failure was pointed out to them at the start of the competition but they claimed that they could not obtain portable toilets from the city fathers. Instead, they dug a couple of holes in the ground and expected woman and children to use same. This was, in one word, unacceptable!

The opening ceremony took place on Wednesday September 24. The processing of models was also completed this day. The number of registered competitors was 30 representing 12 countries and the starting order was randomly selected by the FAI Jury. On the official practice day, Thursday, the weather was still not very good. The sky was overcast, the temperature was in the 60s, a fairly stiff breeze was blowing and a light drizzle interrupted the flying occasionally. Apparently the weather had been excellent for the past month and now the shelters would serve to stop the wind and rain instead of blocking the hot Mediterranean sun. Needless to say we were all very disappointed with the lack of sunshine. The organizers were questioned about scoring the maneuvers using flash cards as prescribed in the rule book and the Jury got a blank stare. The Jury recommended to the organizers that they furnish a set of flash cards for each of the judges and this was done later that afternoon. I was amazed that such seemingly trivial items were missed by the organizers when they did such an outstanding job with the rest of the competition.

Later that evening we had dinner on the field. The food was advertised as local cuisine prepared by a famous chef but most of us did not enjoy it as much as the organizers expected.

The first and second competition rounds were scheduled to be flown on Friday. Before the first round got started I was asked to check the rotor blades for metal tip weights which are not permitted in official FAI competitions. I asked the competition organizers for a metal detector and was told that none was available. Fortunately, a competitor from Austria had brought his own detector and was kind enough to let us use it for the duration of the competition.

The actual competition started Friday morning at approximately 9:00am. The FAI judges were Michelle Ardonceau of France, Lucio Della Toffola of Italy, Rudolf Hadorn of Switzerland, Pierre Pignot of France and Wolfgang Roth of the Federal Republic of Germany. Mr. Roth was also appointed to serve as the chief judge. The weather still had not improved much but, with significant advertising in the local press, a fair number of spectators braved the elements to see what this sport was all about. A problem surfaced during the first round when one of the stop watches was either defective or was misread. A digital stop watch was obtained and no more timing problems were encountered. I was very much interested in determining how the half point scoring system would work using the flash cards. The organizers had constructed the flash cards of clear plastic and had placed numbers on each using red electrical tape. One card had the number five on it to indicate a half point score and the remaining cards were labeled 0 through 10. In discussions before the competition it was decided that the judges should not be expected to write the scores on the score sheets and hold up the flash cards also. Thus, the organizers provided an extra person for each judge whose job it was to hold up the flash card after the judge had written down the score. The "Flasher" held up one card for whole point scores and two cards for fractional scores. The system worked better than most of us had envisioned.

As in most competitions the first round took a long time (about 5 hours) and at its conclusion the first three places were held by Heim (Germany), Lucchi (Italy) and Graber (Switzerland) respectively. Seven pilots received a zero score for the first round because they exceeded the 10 minute time limit or they flew over the prohibited area. However, in one case the timekeeper's watch was found to be in error as several officials timed the same flight and came up with a time under the 10 minute limit. In this case the competitor was allowed to repeat the flight at the end of the round. The FAI Jury asked the competition director to provide digital stop watches so that this problem would be minimized. The first round was completed around 2:00pm and it was clear that the second round could be completed before the end of the day. At the end of the second round the first three place finishers remained unchanged but Brennsteiner of Austria moved up to fourth place from sixth by putting in a very good flight. During this second round none of the pilots exceeded the time limit and none flew over the prohibited area thus all 30 competitors had a flight score shown on the display board.

The third round was flown on Saturday morning and there was no change in the order of finish of the first five places. The competition was running very smoothly at this point and the weather had also improved a little. The number of spectators visiting the competition site had also increased substantially. The fourth and last round was started early in the afternoon and the formal competition ended around 6:00pm, just in time for everyone to prepare themselves for the closing banquet. The top three finishers were Ewald Heim (1), Stephano Lucchi (2) and Daniel Graber (3). These pilots had held their positions since the very first round, indicating very consistent flying. Josef Brennsteiner maintained his fourth position but Ueli Mueller of Switzerland moved up to fifth place after this round because he had received a zero score for the first flight due to overflying the prohibited area. Up to this point Mueller had been listed as 22nd. The competition organizers did not follow the rule book for the determination of the places. They had programmed the computer so that it would throw away the low round only after the fourth round was completed. The rule book clearly states that the places are determined by counting all rounds except the lowest one. Thus, after round two Mueller should have been shown in fifth place because he had the fifth highest score.

The closing banquet took place in one of the large tents located on the flying field. The organizers had contracted for entertainment consisting of young ladies dressed in night gowns parading back and forth in a trailer truck that was open on one side. To say that not everyone there was impressed by this show is an understatement. The food that was served may have been a local delicacy but few of the foreign guests enjoyed it.

The closing ceremony was scheduled to take place on Sunday after a full day of airshow activity to draw a large spectator crowd. Although the entertainment provided by the various flying groups, including a full size Aerospatiale Ecuirel AS-350 helicopter, was enjoyed by all, the award ceremony was delayed so much that the camera crews from the various news media had to shoot pictures into the setting sun. I think that organizers should keep these things in mind when they make up the schedule of events.

Overall, the 2nd FAI F3C European Championships was a success in that the best three pilots were selected from among thirty competitors. The level of flying skill was observed to have increased markedly since the World Championships in 1985. The "Mini Ailes Blagnacaises Model Airplane Club deserves a big thank you for organizing this event. It takes a small army of dedicated people to undertake such a job and the club is lucky to have such people.