

2023 Sky Grand Prix of Aerobatics

Agenda 6.10 – CIVA Report



The third iteration of the Sky Grand Prix of Aerobatics was held at the Virginia airport in Durban, South Africa on the 15th and 16th June 2023 and organised under the auspices of the FAI and Sport Aerobatic Club of South Africa by Roger Deare and Nigel Hopkins. The previous events were held in the same city in 2014 and 2016.

This year's location was at the local General Aviation airfield situated alongside the beach, with the three pylons located on the beach. The deadline was demarcated as the perimeter of the airfield and the performance zone over the ocean. All the required permissions were granted by the local council, emergency services and the South African Civil Aviation Authority.



The organisers had decided to make it a one-day aerobatics-only programme on 16th June, a public holiday, with the competition supported by aerobatic displays provided by two formation aerobatic teams and an RC aerobatic display provided by world champion Cliff Chen of Taiwan . Practice and validation flights were held at the same airfield on 15 June. The public were invited to pre-purchase tickets online, which were also available at the gate on the day. In view of the layout of the airfield, public attendance was limited by the authorities to 5 000 people and all tickets were sold by the time the first flight took off. Many hundreds more were turned away from the gates.



It was originally intended to invite 10 pilots to participate in this event, five foreign and five locally based, all sharing local aircraft. Unfortunately the dates conflicted with many US and European

airshow schedules resulting in only two foreign pilots accepting invitations; Aude Lemordant (France) and Aarron Deliu (Australia). They were joined by the South Africans Nigel Hopkins, Patrick Davidson, Mark Hensman, Barrie Eeles and Eugene du Preez. Aircraft types flown were Extra 330SC, MX2 and GB1 Gamebird.



Proceedings got underway with the opening ceremony and General Briefing on the evening of 15 June, where amongst other items, the Unknown figures were selected by the competing pilots after the drawing of lots. Competition day began with a parade of competitors who then started with the Known program in CAVOK conditions, which was followed by the Freestyle program and ended with the Unknown program in progressively windier conditions, albeit within limits. All flights were conducted safely with no incidents reported. One pilot was disqualified for crossing the deadline – Aude Lemordant in the Known program.



The public announcing was performed by Mike Galaway and it is widely accepted by the organisers that his manner contributed hugely to the success of this format.

The awards and closing ceremony was held on the airfield immediately after the final flight.

A summary of the results;

- a. Known and Unknown Programme
 1. Aaron Deliu
 2. Patrick Davidson
 3. Barrie Eeles

- b. Freestyle programme
 1. Aude Lemordant
 2. Aarron Deliu

3. Nigel Hopkins

c. Overall

1. Aarron Deliu
2. Nigel Hopkins
3. Barrie Eeles



The appointed officials were;

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| - Annie Boon | Contest Director |
| - Cliff Lotter | Flight Director |
| - Registrar / Scorer | Natalie Stark |
| - Mike Galaway (USA) | Public Announcer and Jury President |
| - Quintin Hawthorne | Chief Judge |
| - Guy Auger (FRA) | Judge |
| - Laszlo Liskay | Judge |
| - Johnie Smith | Judge |
| - Mike Stark | CJ assistant |

CIVA had appointed Mike Galaway (Jury) and Guy Auger (Judge) as representatives. The organisers covered the cost of their travel expenses.

The event was promoted almost exclusively on social media leading up to the contest. Local radio and community newspapers supplemented the online promotion. Media coverage on the day was extensive, with live crossings throughout the day by the national television broadcaster SABC, local radio station East Coast Radio also provided live radio commentary, while international, national and local print media provided substantial coverage post the event.

Despite the large-scale support by the public and media, it was a difficult product to sell to sponsors and advertisers, which can only be ascribed to the depressed economy in South Africa currently. The organisers underwrote the costs of the competition but report that the event did result in a break-even bottom line.

The third Sky Grand Prix of Aviation is widely considered to have been a success and it's encouraging to hear that interest has been shown from various quarters to host the next one.

Full results available at www.civa-results.com/2023/SKYGP_2023/indexpage.html

Quintin Hawthorne