

Why AATs – draft of published article

AATs have been around for a while now but their value does not seem to be understood fully. Some people seem to think they are mainly for days when storms could knockout a turn point the advantages are much greater than this.

What do we want out of our competition flying? There are many ways of expressing it but it can be summarised as making best use of the day, flying as far and as fast as you can given the weather on the day.

In days gone by the met men and task setters shouldered all this responsibility. The pilots then just went where they were told to go. Sometimes the task setters got it right and were popular that night in the bar. On other days they got it wrong and calls of hang the task setter were common.

The met people and task setters set the tasks early in the morning typically around 8.00am. To think that these learned people can accurately predict what the soaring conditions will be across the entire task area is pie in the sky.

Allows for variations in the weather

AATs mean that this in precision can be accommodated. We have all flown on days that didn't come up to expectations and we all flew around the task until late in the day we all landed out. Similarly on an under set day we have all tied down our gliders in mid afternoon after racing around a task at record speeds and sat in the bar how much further we could have flown.

Allows pilots to spend more time flying in the good air

Pilots can choose in which parts of the sky they will fly most. Some days are very consistent over a wide area, others are not. Again the task setters can't always know this. AATs allow pilots to make these decisions when they get there and so determine where to fly.

Reduce congestion and gagging

The incidence of gagging seems to be reduced. It is possible to fly all day and not see anyone else. There is no congestion around turnpoints.

Requires more tactical thinking by pilots

Pilots have to think about how to make best use of the day, rather than leave it all to task setters. Surely this is a skill all pilots should have.

Enable pilots to avoid overdeveloped areas

Often seen as one of the key reasons and it is. In the event of a thunderstorm over a turnpoint the task can still be completed.

Makes it easier for slower pilots

AATs suit pilots competing in less competitive aircraft and pilots who are off the pace. They can still complete the task and get home at a reasonable time and avoid out landing most of the time. This is important in this time of encouraging pilots to enter.

Organisation is easier

From an organiser's point of view, you know when most pilots will be home. Most will want to finish a little over but close to the required time. Having recorded the start times, it is easy to predict the likely finish times. Again organisers do not have to wait hours for the last finisher.

Replicates what we do in club flying

On normal club cross county days the slower pilots are encouraged to come along, knowing full well that they will not be able to keep up with the hot shots. What they do is cut the corners and meets up with the hot shots on the next leg. AATs just formalise this process.

Fly off track

If a novice pilots wants to avoid gaggles he can go off track and fly his own race. With a conventional task there is clear penalty for wandering off track.

Pilots decide

Enable pilots to make decisions about where best to fly.

Ralph Henderson