

A TRICKS PARTY PRIMER

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In this country, fliers interested in tricks competition have so far had only the Hot Tricks Shootout to turn to. But because Hot Tricks is not officially recognized by the American Kitefliers Association (AKA), and therefore does not have an official place on the AKA Grand Nationals schedule, it often gets dropped from the competition schedule. Furthermore, the Hot Tricks format does not lend itself well to qualifying competitors for a national competition.

In the last issue of the *Phoenix*, I wrote very briefly about Freestyle World Cup (FWC), the invitational tricks competition held in Cap d'Agde, France, in early May. FWC was styled after the European **Tricks Party** format. At Wildwood, the 40 or 50 people who participated in Friday night's discussion session about the Tricks Party format were treated to a video compilation of footage from France that Rob Autrey had graciously put together in very short order to provide a taste of the event. FWC showed us a way that tricks competition could be standardized to run in a consistent format from one event to the next.

Interest in this format is high. As both new and seasoned competitors contemplate testing themselves in this style of competition, fliers are beginning to develop their own Tricks Party ballet programs and to hone their trick-flying skills. The main vehicle for spreading the word about this new format has been the Internet, and there's certainly a lot of information available online. For those of you who don't have ready access to the World Wide Web, however, here's a synopsis of how Tricks Party competition differs from standard sport kite competition.

Overview

Although Tricks Party competition is not divided into separate classes, as traditional sport kite competition is, it does have both compulsory and ballet components. However, the focus of the Tricks Party competition format—in both compulsory and ballet settings—is, not surprisingly, tricks. And unlike AKA sport kite competition, the Tricks Party format requires competitors to participate in both the compulsory and the ballet segments in order to qualify for awards. The final rankings are based on a combination of the two scores.

Competition Categories

IMPOSED TRICKS

In the compulsory portion of Tricks Party, which is called "Imposed Tricks," competitors must fly predefined tricks such as Flic-Flac, Lazy Susan, or Cascade instead of compulsory figures, and the tricks are judged by the quality of their execution. And where standard precision competition dictates that three figures are chosen out of a maximum of six, in the Imposed Tricks portion of Tricks Party, four tricks are chosen out of a maximum of eight. The four imposed tricks are chosen on the day of competition with the wind conditions taken into account.

All four imposed tricks must be flown within a 2-minute period, and competitors may make a second attempt at each trick as they wish. The price for making a second attempt is that any score earned for that attempt is worth only 80% of the maximum possible. To determine a final score for each trick, the judges compare the scores for first (100%) and second (80%) attempts, and they take the higher of the two scores.

BALLET

For the ballet segment, competitors submit programs ahead of time defining a set of 6 to 12 tricks that they plan to perform for points as part of a choreographed performance, and they are judged both on the execution of those specific tricks within their program and on overall ballet style. The fine points of scoring are included in the Tricks Party guidelines, which are available both on the Eastern League web site (www.easternleague.net) and on NJSKC's web site (www.njskc.com).

Penalties and Disqualification

Penalties in Tricks Party are more relaxed than in standard competition. Ticks and crashes incur some penalties, but the resulting 1- and 2-point deductions in Tricks Party are nearly inconsequential compared to the stiff 10- to 20-point penalties received for crashes in standard competition. Delaying the briefing or exceeding setup time cost a competitor more in penalty points than each tick or crash does.

Perhaps the most notable difference in penalties between standard competition and the Tricks Party format is the fact that, in Tricks Party, flying out of bounds does not disqualify a competitor. In fact, every individual competitor is allowed one free instance of crossing the boundary with kite or body for a maximum of 20 seconds. But even after that first instance, a competitor is allowed to cross the boundary again, each time incurring a penalty of only 1 point for every 15 seconds spent out of bounds.

Field Setup and Flying Out of Bounds

Tricks Party competition is designed to be run on a circular field 80 meters (about 260 feet) in diameter instead of the usual square field. Outside of the "red line" boundary that marks this field, a second boundary about 20 feet away from the red line marks the point that spectators are not permitted to cross. That provides a 20-foot-wide buffer zone between the field boundary and the spectator line.

Now, an 80-meter circle might seem a bit small compared to the normal competition field size, which generally ranges from 75 to 110 meters (246 to 360 feet) square, but because kites fly in an arc to begin with, and because the rule about flying out of bounds is more relaxed in Tricks Party competition, the field size works, even for teams. Many Tricks Party competitors do compensate a bit, however, by shortening their lines to about 110 feet.

The great advantage of the circular field is that it creates the feel of an arena that the normal square field simply does not have. Therefore, the field setup in Tricks Party seems more spectator-friendly than the traditional square field, where the

four corners tend to be relatively dead flying zones that serve only to distance spectators from the action. With the round field, spectators can come in closer around more of the perimeter of the field, get a better look at what's going on, and feel more a part of the action.



The Competition Field at Cap d'Agde, France

The banners ringing the Freestyle World Cup competition field were a colorful, effective way to mark the outer perimeter for spectators while at the same time bringing them closer to each competitor's performance and focusing their attention on the arena of action.

Field Staff

The Tricks Party rules governing penalties for flying out of bounds give the job of **line judge** in this format a significance that it does not have in regular competition. Armed with a flag, a whistle, and a stopwatch, each of the two line judges plays a crucial role in tracking the penalty points that a competitor incurs for flying out of bounds and in signaling competitors when they have crossed the line.

Just as the job of line judge is more demanding in Tricks Party, so, too, is the job of field directing. Even more than in standard sport kite competition, the **field director** must remain close enough to the competitor throughout the performance to be in constant communication and therefore be able to tell the competitor what the next trick in his/her ballet program is. Flying the tricks listed in the ballet program in the proper order is imperative for achieving a good ballet score, and the field director can be an invaluable aid to the competitor in remembering that order. On a no-wind day, this means usually quite a lot of exercise for the field director! This requirement also means that the field director will be far better able to do the job well if he/she can recognize all of the tricks being flown. Since already 41 tricks have been named for this competition, acquiring the knowledge necessary may well be no small task for a Tricks Party field director.

As we know from experience with the Hot Tricks Shootout, trick flying is not by its nature a spectator sport. The differences between many tricks can be quite subtle, and without good explanation of what they're watching, many

viewers see just a jumble of crazy flying that looks out of control, grow weary, and don't stick around long. What we witnessed at Freestyle World Cup proved how much an **announcer** can make the difference between holding a crowd's attention and losing the crowd to baffling complexity. Someone who is knowledgeable about the tricks, about the competitors, and about the way the competition is run—and who can inject a certain amount of pizzazz into relaying that information to the spectators—can do wonders for keeping a crowd interested and entertained, even through the Imposed Tricks portion of the competition!

Wind Limits

One task that is easier for the Tricks Party field director than it is for the standard competition field director is taking wind readings. The wind limits for Tricks Party are defined as a minimum of zero (that means no wind checks for low wind conditions!) and a maximum of 35 kilometers per hour (which translates into 21.7 miles per hour). (At Freestyle World Cup, incidentally, the field director had it even easier on this front, for the rule had been "amended" on the upper end as well to have no limit, so no wind checks at all were required, even though winds were steadily above the normal limit for about half of the competition time. That event, funded primarily by the city of Cap d'Agde, was looked at by the organizers as a show for the town and the spectators. And the attitude was, the show must go on!)

Ground Crew

Wouldn't we all like to have as many people as we want to help us on the field? In Tricks Party, competitors may do just that. There is no limit to the number of ground crew per competitor, and the ground crew may be positioned wherever the competitor wants. In certain challenging wind conditions, the need for extra crew in the riskier Tricks Party format becomes obvious. It can be awfully comforting to have a few extra pairs of hands at the ready in case of disaster!

Testing the Waters on Native Soil

If you want some firsthand experience with the Tricks Party format—as an observer, a competitor, or a future judge, line judge, or field director—you will have several opportunities in the next year. Meeting at Wildwood, the Eastern League Board agreed to try running Tricks Party competitions at several League-sanctioned events in the coming year, on a trial basis. NJSKC (July 23–24) will be the first event in the United States to offer this format. In addition, three Eastern League events in the next season—GISKC (November 2005), SASKC (February 2006), and ECSKC (May 2006)—have tentatively committed to including this format at their events.

Note that offering the Tricks Party format does not mean that any of the traditional sport kite disciplines will be replaced, nor will Eastern League jackets be offered for Tricks Party competition. For now, it's just something to add to the mix and experiment with. Depending on how it fares in the year to come, perhaps it will eventually be added to the official roster of disciplines that the League sanctions.