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USA SOARING  
TEAMS

- SSA Home
- Home
- About
- News
- Reports
- Open
- 18-Meter
- 15-Meter
- Standard
- Club
- World
- Junior
- Feminine
- Camps
- Press
- Gallery
- Committee
- Financials
- Calendar
- Funding
- Selection
- Organization
- Links
- Archive
- History
- Champions
- Site Updates
- Contest Results

**US Team  
eBulletin  
NEWS**  
Sign Up Here

U.S. Soaring Team Day  
Reports & Results

## 2006 FAI Grand Prix

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



## Sunday, September 3 - Day 1

## John Good Reporting

The first competition day of the 2006 French Grand Prix is now complete and has been deemed a success by nearly everyone here. All pilots found some trouble on the 248-km task (some found plenty) and speeds were not impressive, but nearly all finished and are looking forward to the rest of the contest. (Full results can be found at the contest website: [www.cnvv.net/GPF1/en/accueil-en.htm](http://www.cnvv.net/GPF1/en/accueil-en.htm)).

The weather more or less cooperated. We had a glowing forecast at the morning briefing, which spoke of temperatures near 90 degrees and mostly blue thermals to nearly 10,000'. It was indeed hot and some pilots did reach that altitude in the best part of the course, but no one did so consistently.

Starts were a problem for many - in hindsight, it looks as if 13:15 was a bit early to begin the launch. At St. Auban you are usually towed to a local ridge northeast of the field - this is where the early lift is found, but it can be a real struggle to get above this, to where the thermals become reliable. In a normal contest you start when you choose, and when necessary you're content to grind around in pitiful lift for an hour or more, waiting for the day to brew up. It's different at a Grand Prix event: To make a legal start you must be over the airfield at the designated start time (20 minutes after the last glider releases from tow). This involves a 10-km roundtrip from the ridge and then back to it, at which point you are again low and must again struggle to get up. Pilots would probably prefer to sit on the ground a bit longer, waiting until lift is better developed and starting is just a bit less desperate.



## REPORTS

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No team funds  
are used for  
Grand Prix  
events



The glider tracking system allowed spectators to watch the struggles of about half the competitors. Most pilots were barely able to sustain ridgetop height prior to the start and then had to work hard to reach comfortable altitudes. Though the St. Auban



airfield sits at a modest elevation (560m) the preferred task direction (north or northeast) quickly takes you into much higher ground. When you are low, you are stuck - you simply can't proceed until you have the height necessary to stay above the local terrain. In addition, you do well to bear in mind that outlanding possibilities in these narrow valleys can be quite limited. The great soaring for which mountains are famous is usually seen only above the peaks - if you "plunge" low into a mountain valley, the best you can typically expect is a long struggle in weak lift.

Today's task was a "bowtie" shape that headed northeast into the high mountains, then south, west and home. Due in large part to the struggles getting started, the first leg was slow for everyone. The day winner, Nickolas Veron (EQ), was in a terrible way early in the race, miles behind the leaders and very much lower. Showing the value of persistence, he slowly overhauled the lead group, took the lead at the first turn and was near or at the front from there. Doug Jacobs was another who got just about nowhere during the first 20 minute of the race, but then got things going and mostly avoided serious problems thereafter. He said it was one of those days with enough problems that you imagine you are dead last, until you catch up with a competitor who himself has obviously been struggling badly. Doug finished fifth, which will earn 5 points - and any time you beat Eric Napoleon on his home turf, you can claim to have had a good day.



I'd have to say that a Grand Prix contest here is close to an ideal experience for the crew. The superb facilities at CNVV are easily sufficient for contest with 100 entrants. Here we have just 14, which is simply no strain at all. Every glider spends the night fully assembled in a

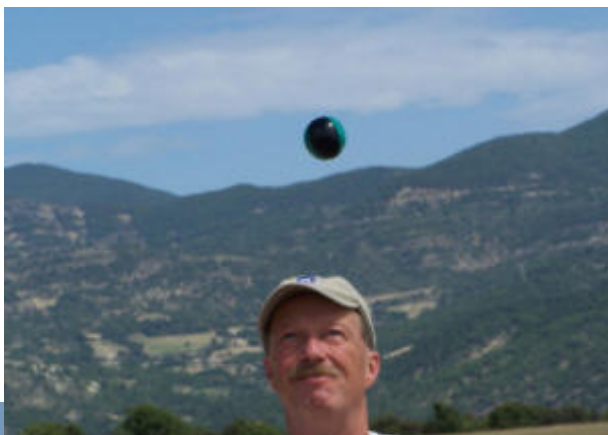
large and nearly dust-free hangar. Batteries are charged in a purpose-built charging rack at the back of the hangar. Should you need any known tool or glider-related item (tape, solvent, seal, adhesive, etc.) you are sure to be able to find it in the adjacent workshop.



In the morning we roll all gliders out through a door that's probably 200' wide, onto a large paved apron. Adding waterballast is usually a big job, but here is almost trivial: six hoses are available, each equipped with an accurate water meter, and the pressure is

something impressive. I can put precisely 67 liters a side into our Discus 2B in about 5 minutes. We tow the glider to a scale where its weight is checked, and then along a paved path to the launch grid, perhaps 200 meters from the hangar. The contest is low-key and all crews are friendly, competent and cooperative.

I can't resist telling a story which suggests that even St. Auban can get things wrong on occasion. In advance of the 1997 World Gliding Championship here, a pre-world contest called Lavender Glide was held in 1996. This was well attended - lots of pilots wanted the chance to see what a top-level contest flown in the southern Alps would be like. For reasons not fully explained, very shortly before the start of this contest it was announced that every entrant would have to supply his own towrope. This was outside the experience of even the oldest competitor, and caused much puzzlement and a big scramble for rope. The British team apparently asked whether they could supply British ropes, usable by any British pilot. The answer was no - every rope had to be marked with a pilot's competition ID, and no pilot could be towed with a rope other than his own.



The post-tow fate of these ropes was curious. The plan was to have the towpilots release each rope in a designated corner of the airfield just prior to landing. Now your typical French towpilot takes a certain pride in the



accuracy of his flying, so this scheme produced an impressive mound of towropes at the end of the flying day. Once the launch was complete a tractor was dispatched to retrieve the towropes. The tractor was equipped with a

wide bar featuring a whole series of hooks to which towropes could be attached. I believe the idea was that during the return trip across the field the ropes would straighten themselves out and thus arrive in an orderly state. The reality was different. In the process of being dragged across the field, the mound of towropes tightened itself into the most unholy snarl imaginable. It then took about 45 minutes for dozens of glider crew to attack the snarl and retrieve their monogrammed rope.

To the considerable credit of the contest organizers, this scheme was abandoned. For the 1997 World contest, towropes were supplied as normal and towing went remarkably smoothly. - *John Good*