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U.S. Soaring Team Day  
Reports & Results

## 2006 FAI Grand Prix

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



## Monday, September 4 - Day 2

## John Good Reporting

Another hot and blue day in the southern Alps. This is rather typical weather for the Haute Provence region of France, though it's probably more typical of August (which this year was cool and rainy) than September. On the ground the temperature hit 92 today. This was supposed to give slightly better soaring conditions than yesterday, but the pilots I spoke to said the thermals (with a few exceptions) were worse. The forecast predicted winds too light for ridge soaring, but the locals experts paid little heed to this and in fact covered a lot of ground in ridge lift.



At the morning briefing we heard some details of Iakov Shrage's (EI's) outlanding yesterday. This took place in an area northeast of here that's not reckoned to be very landable, and wound up as a qualified success. The field was reasonably flat and long, but had some rocks that put a few gouges in the bottom of one wing. Upon his return home, these were promptly sorted out by the highly competent repair shop here – there was no question that the glider would be ready for today's flight.

## REPORTS

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are used for  
Grand Prix  
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I should point out that outlandings in these (and indeed in many) mountains have their own special discipline. The narrow valleys typical of the Alps are not naturally friendly to glider pilots. Here and there you may find an agricultural field sufficient for a landing, but you'll also tend to find wires, side-slopes, drainage ditches and other hazards. You really can't afford to use the standard glider pilot scheme of get low... find a field... evaluate the field ... land safely.

A long time ago glider pilots flying in the Alps realized that if there was to be any hope of keeping the crashery to acceptable levels, something would have to be done to secure some landable fields in critical areas. The result is a model of its kind. In many areas farmers have, in return for an annual payment, agreed to keep one of their field in a state that would allow a safe glider landing. In some cases the fields are excellent; in others, you could expect a chance of minor damage. But these fields make certain areas flyable that otherwise would be suitable only for pilots who are either excessively rich or insane.

The fields are organized into a booklet that gives detail about each one. A diagram shows the orientation and elevation of the field, local hazards (such as wires), slope, surface quality, and pretty much everything you need to know for a fair chance at a good landing. When you take instruction in this area, you learn the importance of keeping one of these fields within reach, how to do so, how to set up a landing when necessary and several other specialized skills that can help keep you and your glider intact.



The Grand Prix concept is supposed to include lots of media and public exposure. A year ago a Grand Prix event was held at St. Auban and received plenty of attention – the public was invited (and turned out), there were airshows and model flying, TV stations sent reporters and the profile was high. This year, we seem to have a "stealth" contest. The only spectators are folks already on the airfield. No TV camera has been spotted within 2km of the airfield this week. This may not be good news for the promotion of

Grand Prix soaring, but it tends to make for an agreeably laid-back and relaxing atmosphere.



I must say that I find the race animation here something of a mixed blessing. Each day the top eight gliders carry a cellphone-based tracker that reports their position a couple of times per minute. From this information and a detailed 3-D model of the terrain, a sophisticated computer program displays a virtual image of the race. You can watch the "overhead" view that shows all tracked gliders, or ask the program to construct the view from the cockpit of any chosen glider (which it does with impressive accuracy). One small hitch is a built-in delay of

at least 6 or 7 minutes.

All this is great from a spectator's point of view. As a crew, it's rather a two-edged sword. I felt this today when watching the race, rooting for Doug Jacobs. He had a great start (by no means a small feat here), took an unorthodox route that worked well, and led all contenders into the first turn. The second leg had some real problems: he spurned a slow climb that many of his followers took, and paid the price – he was low and suffering for at least half an hour. At one point he took a terrain-forced detour that was painful to watch, in view of several other pilots romping along directly on course at carefree altitudes. Rounding the second turn, things improved – many pilots headed a bit east of the courseline; he was among those who deviated west and found better lift. The fourth and fifth legs were excruciating – Doug got low and for an almost unbearable period couldn't connect with a decent climb. He dribbled slowly into the turnpoint, then out again. To avoid the risk of chewing my arm off, I several times had to leave the display area and walk outside. Finally, having dropped desperately low near the town of Digne, he at last connected with a good climb and assured himself of a finish. He was again fifth for the day, and now is fourth overall.



My tentative opinion is that I'm not sure I really want to see exactly what trouble my pilot is facing. Knowing how he must have been suffering near Digne with no ability to offer help was a difficult experience.

Today's winner was again Nicolas Veron (EQ) who now has a perfect score of 20 points. He was among the few who had a good start, and he scarcely put a foot wrong all day. I mentioned how he did a lot of ridge soaring – despite the forecast he found that there was a reasonably reliable southerly breeze, and with a great deal of soaring experience in this area (he is an instructor at St. Auban) he knew just how to put this to good use.

- John Good

DSC00526 – Just one of the giant hangars at St. Auban.

DSC00527 – With Discus 2B Echo Hotel in the foreground, looking southeast across the St. Auban airfield to some rock formations know as *Les Penitants*.

DSC00529 – The ancient hilltop village of Montfort, about a mile west of the airfield.

DSC00530 – The grid.

DSCN0591 – A wide alpine valley.

DSCN0599 – Tilo Holighaus and VV, his Ventus 2.

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