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2006 FAI Grand Prix

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



Thursday, September 7 - Day 5

John Good Reporting

It was rather a strange day in the southern Alps. Through much of the morning it really looked like a poor day for soaring. The forecast offered only modest possibilities – we were told that if pilots could reach the area of the higher mountains, there might be a short period when the lift was good, before thunderstorms took control. But near home we could see mid-level clouds and not much sun on the ground. Talk of the conditions 70 km north of here seemed superfluous, in view of conditions that could not reasonably be expected to support local soaring.



the best days of the week near St. Auban.

The tracking display confirmed this – nearly all gliders were able to start at the appointed time and near the maximum altitude, the first day that this has been the case. Yet from the ground it looked as if the conditions to the north (where the first turnpoint lay) were not as good – mid-level cloud persisted there.



This was pretty much what the pilots found, yet most were able to complete the task. Altitudes in the high mountains were not enough

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to make pilots (or spectators) very confident, yet there was just one outlanding, and speeds were not bad. The day winner was Mario Kiessling (DE) of Germany, who has considerable experience here and has certainly been flying well this week.

I should note that the first turnpoint today was St.Crepin, which is a gliderport located in a narrow valley among the high mountains. Last week this was the site of a contest for K-13 gliders, a 2-seater of modest performance that's much beloved among those who have flown it (sort of the 2-33 of Europe). This contest has become quite popular – we hear that over 20 of these gliders were there. In the theme of a recent movie, they styled themselves "The Pirates of St. Crepin" and all were given a "Jolly Roger" flag to display.



It was rather a tough day for Doug Jacobs. His experience here has suggested that a "plunge" into the area near Seyne (about 40 km northeast of St. Auban) is a good bet. – clouds in this area have worked well most days. Today was the exception – the clouds were there but the lift wasn't. Doug spent something like 40 minutes groveling on local ridges. He finally climbed out and had a rather good flight from there on, but the damage was done. It looks as if he will get no points today.

I was mercifully spared most of this heartache. My mission today was to visit a couple of local olive mills to buy some oil to take home. Provence is notable for the quality of its olives, and the oil we've sampled at local restaurants is certainly something exceptional. My first stop was at a rather industrial-looking establishment



where nonetheless the oil looked (and tasted) first-rate. The second stop was at a "touristic" olive grove which really looked the part. The buildings are all of stone and the olive trees are obviously ancient. Unfortunately, the shop was closed (they were conducting a tour for a busload of visitors) but I intend to return. It would take a heart much harder than mine to resist buying some product from a place that presents itself so well.



Another product for which this area once was famous is lavender. I've mentioned how the 1996 pre-World contest was called Lavender Glide – it was held at the right time of year (late June), so the lavender fields were in bloom and presented a wonderful spectacle both to the eye and the nose. At St. Auban, there are gardens near some of the buildings, and these include lavender. At this time of year the color isn't much, but the smell is amazingly good.

Unfortunately, it seems that synthetic lavender essence has more or less wrecked the market for the real thing. It's said that the authorities in Provence now pay certain farmers to keep planting a few fields in lavender, so that tourists (who tend to be rooted in the past) will not go away completely disappointed. But progressive farmers here are planting their former lavender field with olive trees (synthetic olive oil has mercifully not yet penetrated the market).



Photos by John Good

534 – Sunshine among the scrub oak trees that border the St. Auban runway.

549 – Tilo Holighaus finishing a task in his Ventus 2.

542 – Tilo's reaction to a second-place finish.

548 – Tilo's daily sendoff includes best wishes from Charlotte (1 yr) and Amelie (2.5). Not shown is Amelie's twin, Felix.

555 – The Grand Prix grid. In the background is the local ridge (where gliders are towed most days) and the large smokestack (which here indicates that the wind is southerly, and thus it may be time to start the launch).

559 – Giant laminated wood beams support the huge hangar where all Grand Prix gliders are housed each evening.

561 – Marion Kiessling (DE - left) and Nicholas Veron (EQ).

568 – Olive trees in a nearby grove.

595 – Ridges of the southern Alps.