

The Capacity to Reformulate Competition Strategy

So that we don't get confused, let's differentiate terms (which will serve as a preface for next month's skill discussion as well). Strategy is a long term plan of action targeting a goal. Tactics, are the specific actions employed to implement the strategy.

Your soaring strategies must be preconceived, and you'll need as many as the competitive environments you are likely to encounter. Weather conditions, your competitors, your standing, your equipment, your strengths and weaknesses are among the factors to be considered when formulating and applying a strategy to guide your tactical decisions.

Several years ago, Baude Litt (LBL) was in the lead on the last day of the contest. His closest competitor was Mike Smith (XM). Since Baude's goal was to win the contest, a strategy of keeping Mike in sight meant that Mike would be unable to pull a coup. If Mike employed a strategy that might win him the lead on the final day, Baude would be there to capitalize on it as well. A very good competitive strategy; one used in many types of racing.

Of course, most of us don't typically find ourselves in a position of defending the championship of the final day. Instead, we need to employ strategies that will keep us high in the standings throughout the contest.

Here's a simple example. Blue days can be extremely challenging, even when the lift is strong and high. The problem comes in finding the lift, since there are typically no significant visual cues to guide you. It's far too easy to wander into a sink street on a blue day, and it typically takes much longer to identify the error and correct it.

Experienced pilots understand that a winning performance in the blue almost always demands flying with the "fast gaggle." And even if you can't find the fast gaggle, any gaggle is better than none.

Of course, the Brigliadores assume you already have a quiver full of strategies. What they're interested in addressing is your ability to change strategies on course. If you cannot consciously "shift gears," then it's unlikely that you will apply the tactics needed to optimize your performance in a changing competitive environment. And I think where most of us fail ourselves is in not putting in the time on the ground to establish a half or a baker's dozen clear strategies to guide our tactics. Without them, the gears grind, leading, at best, to a very slow performance, and at worst, to a long wait for the trailer.

Most of us have the experience to come up with a few different kinds of race days. As an experiment, define these. Blue days, ridge days, streeting, lots of competitors, few competitors, ASTs, MATs, TATs, leading, trailing, and permutations thereof. For each of these situations, figure out which tactics are best suited to the conditions. Memorize them. Then, with each flight, choose a strategy and apply it. If the conditions change, choose another strategy, and apply it, letting it guide your tactics. You might find it's much easier to make decisions if you have a guide ready at hand.

Define your gears, then choose the one suited to the road ahead.