

Israeli Pilot Wins Powered Paraglider Contest in California



Israeli pilot Arnon Lufi won the powered paragliding contest with a score of 2058 points.

Powered paraglider pilot Arnon Lufi traveled all the way from Israel to the Salton Sea, California to compete in a contest sponsored by ParaToys.

The ParaToys Powered Paragliding Fly-In and Convention was held at the Vista Del Mar Estates from February 5-8, 2004. For more information on the Fly-In and contest rules, turn to page 18 for "ParaToys Hosts The 2004 Powered Paragliding Fly-In."

One hundred sixty-six pilots attended the fly-in, and 15 of those competed in the contest on February 7. All 15 pilots were very proficient aviators and performed remarkable feats. Arnon won the contest with a score of 2058 points. Jeff Goin, President of U.S. Powered Paraglide Association captured second with 1870 points, and Bob Ryan took third with 1777 points.

Although other pilots traveled from Chicago, Houston and Miami, Arnon Lufi traveled the farthest. To keep travel light, Arnon did not bring his own paraglider. This meant he competed with equipment loaned to him by Bob Armond, President of ParaToys. Arnon flew a paraglider with a ParaToys wing and a Skycruiser FT 100 engine.

Arnon Lufi, age 36, has been flying powered and unpowered paragliders for 15 years. He makes his living as a flight instructor and a handyman who specializes in electrical work, plumbing, and engine maintenance. He also performs security surveillance and search and rescue for the police force in Israel. He flies the powered paraglider about 100 hours each year, professionally. In addition, he flies his unpowered paraglider for recreation.

The first contest Arnon entered was the UK National Foot Launched Powered Aircraft Championship in May 2001. Despite his inexperience Arnon placed fourth out of 13 pilots. The thrill of competing intrigued Arnon, and he has since traveled throughout the world to enter contests and participate in special flying projects.

A few months after his first contest, Arnon entered his second—The PPG World Championship held in Spain in 2001. This time Arnon took ninth in a field of 60 world-class pilots. Arnon also entered the PPG World Championship in 2003. He was the Israeli Nation Champion in 2001 and 2003.

I asked Arnon how he was able to do so well in his very first contests. He carefully describe a secret tactic which enabled him to place high in the rankings, but which would not ensure first place. He explained that winning a national contest does not require the contestant to be an excellent pilot. He must take chances. He must fly to the very limit of his ability. He must hope his engine has no problems, and that wind, visibility, turbulence, and unfamiliar terrain will not pose undue obstacles. In many cases, it is not the very "best" pilot who wins but a "good" pilot who is also *lucky*. The best pilot may fall in the rankings because he pushes the limit too far, and may thus get a "zero" in one of the contest tasks, lowering his overall score

Arnon's secret was to fly more conservatively and take fewer chances, but to consistently do well. He decided he would try to place third or fourth in every task, rather than place first in a couple tasks and tenth in others. Employing that strategy, his cumulative score secured him a fourth place in his very first contest in Britain. As he gained more experience, he allowed himself to take greater risks, which paid off in actually winning contests.

Arnon has flown in Israel, England, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Turkey and Costa Rica. Arnon flies trikes as well as paragliders, and he demonstrated the Polaris Flying Boat in Costa Rica. He has flown paragliders with more than 60 different canopy types and more than 40 different engines. He designed and built a motorized tandem rig, called the "Vortex Tandem," which self-adjusts for different passenger weights.

This was not Arnon's first time in the United States. In 2002 Arnon teamed up with Grant Smith, noted ultralight enthusiast and Reflex wing dealer, to demonstrate the wing to prospective dealers throughout the US. Over a period of four months he transported Grant's paraglider by truck and demonstrated it to dealers in 38 different states.

Arnon confesses his scariest moment flying the powered paraglider was over the English Channel near the island of Guernsey, when his engine suddenly stopped. He headed for a castle situated on top of a rocky bluff. There was only a small area in the rugged terrain where he could have a chance of landing without injury. The ocean water was even less attractive, with its cold, wind-swept waves. After several attempts, Arnon was able to restart his engine at an altitude of only 40 feet.

Another question I had was what it's like to fly in Israel, which is under constant threat of terrorist attacks. When away from his home in central Israel, Arnon calls the local police station before flying. That way he can find out if there is any undesirable activity in the vicinity. He can also alert the authorities that he will be flying in that area. As far as getting permission to fly from the owners of various fields, it is actually easier than in the United States because Israel is not as litigious as the US.

Israeli lawyers do not peruse lawsuits on a "contingency" basis, as do US lawyers. Plaintiffs pay their attorneys by the hour in Israel, so they hesitate to file suit unless they feel strongly they will win. In addition, it is customary for the loser in a lawsuit to pay the costs of both his attorney and his adversary, giving a plaintiff even more incentive to sue only if he has a good case. Because landowners are not as concerned about liability, it is easier to get permission to use their fields.

As in the US, microlights in Israel are not allowed to fly over cities, except for special events. Arnon has flown over cities more often than most Israeli pilots, while performing his duties for the police. When flying in uncongested areas, Arnon normally flies around 300 feet. The maximum altitude he has flown is 14,000 feet.

Arnon would like to enter more contests, but the costs of practicing and traveling to competition sites is quite expensive. It cost him over \$1,500 to attend the ParaToys Fly-In. His next major goal is to enter the World Air Games in 2005. Arnon would be happy to talk to anyone who would like to sponsor him, in return for advertising opportunities. Arnon's e-mail is arnonfly@hotmail.com. His web site is <http://agur.ccc.co.il/>.

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