



Gaggle flying at Bright



Nicky Moss finished third in two tasks



Steve Ham: just missed second place

Bright Open

Six tasks in eight days doesn't sound too bad, but when four of them score less than 125 points for the winner it makes for a tight competition. The Open, held from February 19th - 26th, didn't look like it would be valid at all until the final task, when the weather was just good enough. In fact the summer in this part of Australia had failed to start properly, with wind and storms affecting both Bright and Manilla. Nevertheless, 102 pilots were registered for the biggest Bright Open ever.

Day 1: 8:30am briefing, and 110 pilots listened to the introduction and local rules. Unfortunately the heavily clouded sky never cleared to reveal the blue above it. The day was cancelled at 14:00.

Day 2: The forecast was proved wrong as thunderstorms woke us at 5am. I'm glad I'm not camping. Despite a re-brief at 11:00 the day was cancelled. We endured a DVD fest, then discussed them at the free pizza night. There was a huge amount of drinking to the weather gods whilst the heavens opened.

Day 3, Task 1. Although the rain had stopped by morning, clouds hanging in the valley and wave bars over the big mountains inspired nothing. The forecast wasn't too bad and at 10:30 the whole shebang went up to Mystic launch. The clouds were heading north not too far above launch (which faces north), with a very light breeze up the face. A 47km race to goal to the north-west was set and pilots started to launch at 13:15 with a four-slot ordered launch. The first pilots off went to the clouds at 1,500m whilst later pilots struggled. The task was into a headwind, the thermals were weak, the clouds broken... and did I mention the headwind? The best distance was nearly 17km with only a handful making it to the start gate, 35km from goal. Best Brit was Steve Ham in ninth place overall. The top points were 70 with 33 for a bomb-out (though the launch order for the following day is very important).

Day 4: Task 2. Sunshine, blue skies and the promise of a stonking day. Hmm... A 60.3km race to goal was set around two turnpoints. Many pilots launched early and easily climbed to 300m above launch; there they stayed. More launched as the inversion got a little higher. Many were off by 13:00 and were all just above launch. The headwind was lighter than yesterday but base was elusive; no clouds and light thermals. Clear Spot, 3km down

the course line, was working quite well and huge gaggles were climbing to 1,500m. After that it was decision time. Most of the early pilots went to cross the valley perpendicular to the course line to use the ridges to the north, and most of these went down within 10km. Seeing the carnage, the later pilots went straight down the course line... and also went down. Local pilot Brian Webb waited patiently, then picked his way past Turnpoint 1 to win the day flying 31km. Rock Rhettman was second with 24km and everyone else was at 10km or less. Best Brit, in third place, was Nicky Moss.

Day 5: Task 3: Hot with blue skies and the mother of all inversions predicted. A 46km elapsed time task was set, with individual times from Turnpoint 1. Turnpoints 2 (at 1,000m) and 3 (at 600m) were on the Goldmine ridge, then race to goal at Harrierville. Some went off early and some late, hoping for improved conditions. The inversion at 1,300m was omnipresent but not impossible to pass. Climbs to 1,600m above Clear Spot (slightly off course but reliable) made the first turnpoint easy, but over the back of launch to the Goldmine ridge was a long glide. Those that made it got steady climbs to 1,700m and above. The glide into goal had a ridge in the way just to make people look up from their instruments. Those who flew later did have better conditions and made it faster, but departure and arrival points rewarded the early pilots. Enda Murphy won the day with a time of 80 minutes. 50 were in goal, most in under two hours. Top Brit was Steve Ham in fifth place.

Day 6: Task 4. With grey sky and 45km winds at Mount Hotham the day looked grim. The sun came out for a couple of hours and a 43km race around six turnpoints was set. Most of the field launched quickly into ratty thermals and up to 25km/h north winds. The clouds came back at around 16:00 and the locality started to rain paragliders. 50 didn't make it past the 5km minimum distance and the rest ended up round Turnpoint 3. Enda Murphy won the day, getting within 4km of Turnpoint 4 with Steve Ham a couple of km behind. The day scored 115 points for the winner and 45 for minimum distance. After four tasks the positions are really based on the results of Task 3. About another 200 points are needed to make the 1,500 required for world ranking points, and the forecast isn't great for the next two days.

Day 7: Task 5. The task was shortened due to strong winds, and delayed again whilst strong thermals crossed launch. The task was shortened again to a 27km race around five turnpoints. The

first few pilots launched and went up; more followed but the conditions were weakening and the dodgems were hair-raising. Launch was closed for a while to wait for the melee to clear, but those left were finding it hard to leave. Meanwhile those that got to the next ridge were soaring it at 1,000m waiting for the start. Then it was really a race to the ground, some getting to Turnpoint 3 and a handful landing just short of Turnpoint 4. The day had 70 DNFs and bomb-outs, scoring a magnificent 56 points for joint winners Steve Ham and Craig Collings with 14.3km. Nicky Moss was joint third.

Day 8: Task 6. We needed 120 points to make the competition valid and the mood was not expectant. We went to Mystic at 11:30 to suck it and see. A 46km race to goal around four turnpoints was set. The open launch queue filled quickly, and for 15 minutes people left and went up. Pilots continued firing off the hill when the ordered launch started. Thankfully Clear Spot was buoyant, as 70 or so pilots waited at around 1,700m for the start to open. It was beginning to look like the best day of the week. The field spread fairly quickly, the racers stopping for nothing but good climbs. Along the Goldmine ridge, we were wondering what was happening as thermals got to 2,000m and you could finally see the backdrop of the Snowy Mountains. Pyramid was Turnpoint 3, then an into-wind leg to Porepunka bridge. This proved too much for some as a lower gear was needed. Then a final glide to goal over fairly well-known ridges. The day was won by James Lawson, who'd been racing into the deck all week. Steve Ham came in fifth, just losing his second place overall.

1	Enda Murphy	Aus	Advance Omega proto
2	Andrew Horchner	Aus	Gin Boomerang
3	Steve Ham	GB	Gradient Avax RSE (Snowdon Gliders)
4	Craig Collings	Aus	Gradient Avax RSE
5	Craig Donnell	Aus	Nova Radon
12	Mark Graham	GB	Advance Sigma 6 (websalve.com)
19	Paul Russell	GB	Nova Radon
50	Nicky Moss	GB	Advance Omega 6 (Juice Plus+)
60	Jon Shaw	GB	Ozone Vulcan
81	John Stevenson	GB	Ozone Vulcan
85	Rob Couper	GB	Gin Bandit
91	Nestor Patrikios	GB	Apco Bagheera
96	Stuart Banks	GB	Firebird Matrix

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