

Mental Preparation for Cross Country and Competition



About Lisa

Where I came from

- 1st solo cross country at 15
- 1st 300km at 17
- 1st Nationals at 18
- Very supportive family – great role models
- Was often only female pilot at competitions well into my 30s
- Often youngest competition pilot well into my 30s

Start of journey

- Had a few key supporters early on, helped to get specialist coaching BUT I was not the hot young talent everyone talked about
- Maurie Bradney asked me at my 1st cross country coaching week, at 16 years old, if I had ever considered flying at a world comps – blew my mind away that could be possible

Lisa - now

- 3 times World Comps Pilot
- Learning to balance gliding & family – constant juggle and work in progress.
- Hard work to get back to top comp form post baby. Almost like starting again, but with Mummy guilt too.



Preparation – the 5 P's

You know what it means. It's true, all the champions swear by it.

- The better you prepare all the tangible things, the better you can cope with the non-tangible. So prepare:
 - Your glider trailer for the season
 - Your car
 - Your personal equipment (water, food, navigation system, outlanding kit etc)
 - Your glider and its equipment
- If these things are not prepared, you will focus on them, not on your mind

Lots of equipment for me and team at WWGC



Mental Preparation

The Reality – its normal to feel:

- Anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Like you are not a good enough pilot
- Like you don't know what you are doing

Acknowledge these thoughts, we all have them, but don't let them consume you.

Apply mindfulness techniques and focus on what you can control and let the negatives fall into the background.

You can practice these techniques at home.

What to mentally prepare for

- Stages of the flight – go through them in your mind, do 1 stage at a time. Envisage yourself doing these well and also envisage how you will cope with unexpected circumstances at each stage.
 - Pre-launch (watch the mental ground game here even on club days), launch, pre-start (lots of games at comps here), start, on task, finish, landing
- Be aware of the impact of socialising on the grid on you and your state of mind pre-take off. Does it help you, or only work you up?
- Learn some breathing exercises if you get anxious pre-launch

Early cross country pilots

Fact: You will end up in a big hole on most flights early on

Also fact: In your mind you will blame yourself for getting in that hole

How you respond in your mind defines how you get out of the hole

- Everyone can grovel out in 1-2 kts. Even you.
- But its mentally hard to do it. Your mind will re-run the errors you made to get here. It will tell you that others didn't make this mistake, that it's you as a poor pilot who did this. That everyone will be home hours before you.
- All your demons will come to haunt you at this low point of self confidence
- You can easily talk yourself into an outlanding at this point

I'm in the hole, what now?

- You can't change how you got into the hole
- You can change how you get out of it. Dig deep mentally.

Say these things to yourself:

- Everyone else is also having a hard time at this point, it's the cycle of thermals today.
- Retrieves take forever. My fastest way home now is to dig out, even if I am the slowest finisher.
- I get more points for finishing slow than for outlanding
- Settle in for that long slow climb out. Be patient with the climb, work it up slowly into a stronger climb. Get height. Reward yourself for small goals eg. Climbing 500 feet, ok now another 500 feet etc.
- Don't think about the rest of the flight yet, just focus on digging out



- Use prompts to avoid tunnel vision and tunnel thinking

Digging out

- Turn the radio off if its distracting. Most of it is bullshit anyway.
- What body parts are tense now? Try to relax one part at a time, but keep climbing out
- Once you settle into the climb and out of imminent outlanding, reward yourself with a drink and a snack.
- Look up and look out – who and what is around you now?
- Don't get impatient and push on until you are sure. Set a height you must reach to leave.
- Once out, put the hole behind you and focus on the rest of the flight

Post flight

- Unpack the good parts of the flight. What did you do well? Digging out is a big effort, acknowledge it.
- Tomorrow is a new day. Start fresh, don't drag today into tomorrow.
- Everyone has a hard day at a comp. Tomorrow is someone else's turn
- We all learn from our mistakes, we don't grow without them. Everyone has an epic story of a mistake from early cross country flying, just ask them 😊
- Many have slept in their gliders overnight in a paddock....

Find your team

- Find the group of friends you want to surround yourself with when flying cross country/at a comp. It may not be who you think it is
 - You must be able to trust them and believe what they say
 - You probably don't want to be overly competitive with them
 - Who is it who really looks out for you? Checks up on you? Doesn't judge you? Makes you feel comfortable no matter what happened today.
 - These are the people you want to surround yourself with, not necessarily the 'cool kids'
- Bar talk can also be bullshit – remember the game within the game – can be subtle and underhanded or overt like cricket/AFL

Top Tips

- P P P P P. If you are not prepared, then you have no spare headspace to cope with the unexpected.
- Seek coaching & spend time in a 2 seater. It may seem like a backwards step but you will progress quicker than struggling in a single seater
- Coaches can help with mental preparation too, but get the tangible preparation done first
- Find your team to support you
- Remember the game within the game. It's not a game for early pilots and catches many out.

How did I mentally prepare for WWGC19?

- P P P P P for my glider, equipment, accommodation, crew – everything within my control (because plenty happened outside my control)
- I identified things I knew from experience threw me and I worked on them during the year:
 - flying in smoke and marginal safety conditions – how would I mentally cope with that? At what point would I abandon flight for safety reasons?
 - Tension within the Australian Team (largest team ever, lots of personalities) – how I would use my team (crew) to create a bubble around me if necessary
 - Which team mates I could confide in if I needed to
 - How I would emotionally respond to a mid-air collision, including of a team mate
 - My personal airfield evacuation plan if bushfire

What happened at WWGC outside of my control?

2 weeks before Christmas:

- Last minute change of crew due Dad's heart condition
- Last minute offer of a different glider
- 2 Unexpected job offers

How I responded:

- I ID'd lots of unexpected stress and I was at my coping limit
- I used work EAP to talk to a counsellor, acknowledge my limits and work out a plan forward for each issue

My team at WWGC



Worst WWGC smoke day



Typical WWGC smoke day



What happened at WWGC outside of my control?

During the contest

- SMOKE, SMOKE, SMOKE
- My team mates nearly dying in the smoke, listening to that on the radio whilst still racing my task...

How did I manage that?

With great difficulty, focusing on my flight, my task, what I could control.

Some of us debriefed together at the end of the day. Often talking through how you feel helps.