

Rise Off Ground

In the UK, Rise Off Ground comes with the territory of modern era Vintage Wakefield. An early adage "Nobody practices ROG any more!" has been overtaken by the fact that we simply get our practice at the competitions.

Most CD's opted for ROG whenever the conditions allowed and sometimes when they did not. My first recollection was at RAF Watton around 1982 for the annual Bob Wells' Wakefield Meeting. However for the modern era of Vintage Wakes, David Baker set things in concrete at the 1984 50th anniversary of the 1934 Wakefield Cup meeting at Warwick Racecourse.

That set the pattern for the future and when Mike Kemp formulated the Sam35 Wakefield rules ROG was an "unwritten" inclusion, but CD's were expected to do the "right thing". You turn up, you enter, you ROG. No need to practice, you get plenty of opportunity to work it out in battle.

In those earlier days, 1984 onwards, the CD would thoughtfully bring along a large canvas or rush mat and stake this out on the grass.



Above is my "Northern Arrow" at Warwick. Is that a "Korda" waiting in line? Note the natty ensemble of shorts and wellies designed to cope with specially long and wet grass on a hot day.

A ROG location became THE focal point of an event, cameras trained on virtually every take-off and a small crowd always present, but respectfully a few paces back. Actually, mostly they had in mind their own personal safety, but not always.

Here is the same take-off mat at a different venue and the same "Northern Arrow" at a spacious RAF Barkston Nationals, probably in the same year. Colin Watts and the great Fred Chapman are officiating.



Occasionally we were treated to a sheet of plywood or fiber-board and in both the case of mat or board it was best not to have too many wisps of long grass present. Carnage might ensue.

This is Middle Wallop (MW). Almost as many cameras as people and just look at the size of the parrot on that cameraman's shoulder. No wonder he is creaking at the knees. Early days, from the look of my physique. Boy that "Voodoo" fizzed. Still does.

When David Baker started organizing the 1066 Euro Bashes at MW, within a year he had a splendid round take-off table constructed and painted with great artistry. It became a perpetual focal point of these three days of meetings for nearly 15 years. With so many of us feeling our age, rumor had it that David thought he could only enforce ROG if the contestants did not have bend their knees down to ground level. In reality then, I suppose, our acronym should be ROT? (tee hee)

Here is "Le Vibrant" attempting to ROG from the ubiquitous MW take-off table but she had this habit of going flat and right for 100 feet and scaring any onlookers clean out of their socks. Off the ground, "Le Vibrant" does not have this habit (Is that what they mean by "ground effect"?). Waiting in line is Sam35Speaks' "Rubber Column" guru Andrew Longhurst.



Two more images of the MW table this time with the "Northern Arrow". Longhurst and William Beales (son of David) are waiting in line. William subsequently made the UK F1B team on several occasions for World and European championships during the 1990's.



In the second shot, "Northern Arrow" was held together with drafting tape for all three rounds and this fly-off flight, following a wizard prang off the table in round one. The timekeeper here is Brian Yearley, Dave Baker's son-in-law. In his right hand he is holding my binos and radio tracking receiver. Tracking was allowed for fly-off's, but not rounds!

Notice that the table looks partially legless, careworn and somewhat hilly. Apart from being used for only three days annually, it spent the rest of its life in an old caravan parked at MW. Over the years the caravan became more ventilated and its contents, including the table, suffered as a result. Eventually the caravan and all its contents were stolen and vandalized. I think the thieves destroyed everything in disappointment of the condition of its contents.



Finally, and more recently at RAF Odiham, the very potent 11 oz "New Look" contends with yours truly ("Does my bum look big in this?") for the heaviest relic on show that day. Note the quite steep takeoff angle that single U/C leg might generate, if required, to ROG from unfriendly grass (see later). Odiham is a magnificent site but it has two drawbacks. First, the security is tight and requires pre-registration. And second, frequently, the military fly in some helios so everything goes on hold, which can seriously shorten the day if they do it too often.



So what is the attraction of all this ROG? It's hard to say, but the Brits are gluttons for punishment. In reasonable conditions and with sufficient space then most contestants are happy to participate. At our larger meetings there are so many cars on the perimeter that take off from concrete is somewhat dicey. Add to this anything more than a medium breeze and it becomes quite taxing.

Witness the 2005 1066 Eurobash when the practice was severely tested. There was no official take-off board. The cars stretched in a continuous line for over 600 yards along the peri-track and eliminated any chance of take-off anywhere near the vehicles. The CD's on all three days called for ROG, and on the middle day the 8oz Wakefield boys had a torrid time.

The breeze got up quite early on and folks were attempting to take off from their own car mats, bits of plywood, model boxes, what ever they could cobble together. On top of that the max was set to three minutes.

Trouble was the grass was not mown and models were getting caught in the longer stuff before they got any height at all. You only got away with it if you went out on absolute full chat, making the model literally leap for freedom. Anything flat died. Just three out of thirty-two made the flyoff and only Peter Michel recorded a flyoff time. Carnage ruled that day.

Let me add however, this is not a grievance, merely hindsight wisdom about wrong choice. It was shame on that day of near perfect but breezy weather, that so many beautiful models hurt themselves. For the record my "New Look" fielding 110 grams of Tan II, fully stressed, made all three ROG's straight from the grass with its single retractable U/C leg paying dividends. It still dropped 72 secs out of 9 minutes due to choice of air and a bunch, out of luck but no carnage for me that day.

I do have a confession however, in 1993 using the "New Look" Wakefield, I did once practice ROG at RAF Henlow, but luckily there were no witnesses to this clear breach of etiquette.

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