

Beauty, Dorks and Other Observations.

by Bill Cavanaugh

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Having just spent two days at the BASS Memorial Contest at Walkersville, I can't help but observe changes in our great hobby. The "Hot Ships" of the day keep changing. I can remember when the hottest of the hot was the Paragon, a fine flying sailplane and a floater in the days when floaters were considered to be the best competitive ships. Then came the Acquila, later the Lovesong and then the Magic. The Hot Ship of our contest was Tom Kiesling's Mantis. There were quite a few of them in our contest, more than any other.

If you have never seen a Mantis, let me describe it for you. Visualize a broomstick with a V tail, a wing on a pylon about four inches above the broomstick, and bulge way out on the front end. It looks all out of proportion, with a couple of feet of broomstick in front of the wing. There is only one word that describes this sailplane: ugly.

Now you may remember that one of Cavanaugh's Laws is that good looking airplanes fly better than ugly ones, just as clean cars run better than dirty ones. I made one exception to that law, and that was Woody Blanchard designs. Woody has a penchant for ugly sailplanes and they always fly well, much to my chagrin, but there always seems to be an exception to every rule. I can live with one exception, but now there are two; The Mantis is a great flying sailplane and a contest winner. Tom was Grand Champion of our contest with a Mantis-looking sailplane that he says is not really a Mantis. For my purposes, it doesn't matter since it was just as ugly. So now with two exceptions, I may have to reconsider my law, and maybe even build a sailplane that is a little bit ugly just to stay up to date (it won't be a Mantis, though, that is way too ugly). I don't want technology to pass me by.

And speaking of ugly and its opposite, beauty, and what is more beautiful than a smooth, greased-on landing? This is something that has gone by the boards in recent years as far as R/C sailplanes go. Getting maximum landing points in a circle has engendered that atrocious maneuver, the Dork. Let's face it, the way to hit the center and get the full 100 points is to spear it in. Sailplane design has accommodated this necessity with strengthened nose cones and a variety of protuberances underneath the fuselage to defeat greased-on. When touchdown occurs, the sailplane stops. So fully deploy the flaps - even crow with a full house - aim the nose down and make like a dart! Ugly but effective; not one of the nicer things about flying sailplanes. However all is not lost.

There is another kind of landing task, not new -- actually as old as the Wright Flyer -- but recently brought back by soaring CDs, and used in our own contest. It is the Runway Landing. Takes your breath away, doesn't it? A strip runway is laid out into the wind, hopefully, and max landing points are earned by greasing it down the strip and stopping with the sailplane nose right on the strip, or center line of the runway. A graduated rod measures the distance from the strip to the nose if you do not stop exactly on the strip. In my opinion, this is a major advance and I sincerely hope and expect that it will catch on to be the new landing standard. It makes so much

more sense. I never in my life saw a full scale sailplane deliberately make a dork landing, so why should we modelers not emulate our full scale brothers? This change may be a bit traumatic for those pilots who have become Dorkmasters. In fact I noticed that a number of contestants in our contest dorked in even though the need was not there. Habit dies hard, I guess. But in time they will come around, and maybe sailplane designers will revert to more beautiful designs as the need for dorkproofing subsides. I am not alone in my aversion to ugly. Model Aviation has reported antique sailplane contests. Maybe I'll build my Bird of Time kit that I have had in the basement for ten years. There is a beautiful sailplane.