

Level 5 Story

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Reaching LSF Level 5 has been a goal of mine for many years. I had done Level 1 about ten years ago, and spent the next several years muddling about in Level 2, without ever getting focused on finishing it. When I met Don Pesznecker, he was just beginning to fly RC gliders, and I encouraged him to start working on the LSF accomplishment program. He did Level 1 one weekend, Level 2 the next, and I suddenly realized with a shock that he had passed me up! That was enough to get me focused! Pesz did the first four levels in eight months, and I finished Level 4 shortly behind him in Spring of 1995. We looked at the tasks for Level 5 and tried to decide which was going to be the most difficult for us to do: was it the contest wins, the 2 hour thermal flight, the 10 kilometer goal and return or the dreaded 8 hour slope flight? They all looked pretty unlikely to me, but we began planning a methodical attack together.

We flew LOTS of contests in 1995. Pesz won one that counted for Level 5 (more than 20 entries), which encouraged us greatly. We both upgraded our equipment, and I moved from flying a Joustler to a Genie and a Thunderbird. The bigger planes worked better for me, and I began placing higher in the contests. I made the flyoffs of the Northwest Soaring Society (NWSS) Tournament for the first time that year with the T-Bird. At that time, I was beginning to get sick with a serious illness, and got progressively worse through the Fall and Winter. I spent a week in the hospital

in November, a week in February, and another in April. At the end, I was so sick that I couldn't eat or drink anything, so I got all my nutrition intravenously for six weeks. Fortunately, I recovered from that bout and was able to start on a new combination of medicines that promised good things. I was still unsure if I would be able to do any flying in 1996, because of my weakened condition, but Pesz had been planning a Level 5 weekend in the Tri-Cities of Washington for June 1st, so I made arrangements to attend. The story of how I made only two flights that weekend, but managed to complete three of the LSF 5 tasks has already been told (*RCSD* October 1996), but I will summarize briefly. On Saturday, June 1st, we had a sunny day with no wind, so we set up winches to attempt the thermal and goal & return tasks. I was among the first to launch in the morning, and promptly found a good thermal which took my Viking Models Contestant up to a really good height. I hopped in the Mustang convertible with Glenn Pyle driving and Prashant Manikal timing, and spotting and we set off down the road. The lift was not fully developed yet, so the outbound trip was challenging. Three times I had to scratch from below 100 feet, but I always managed. We made the goal, and started the return trip, as the lift kept improving. After a while, I had the plane in a strong thermal, and was trying to get as much altitude as possible when Prashant said, "You're only two miles from the finish. I think you can make it." I immediately told Glenn to punch it, and headed down the road. Shortly, we could see a plane in lift at the start/finish area, and I sent the plane out ahead of us into that thermal. When we drove up to the field, I had been in the air for almost two hours, so I hung out for a while and landed at 2:05, giving me both tasks in one flight! I let Prashant use the plane the rest of the day for his Level 4 tasks. On Sunday, we went to the slope, and both Pesz and I completed our 8 hour flights. I was quite surprised to find that I was feeling pretty darn well after all that flying. I joked that it wasn't much of a weekend, as I only got in two flights! My plane had over 12 hours of air time that weekend.

Now, the only thing left was to win three big contests. Only! I won a contest in June of 1996 with my old Joustler, but there were just 19 pilots, so it didn't count. It was a great boost to my confidence to win against the likes of Dave Johnson, Jim Thomas, Harley Michaelis and Tom Brightbill. In August, I got my first win that counted, flying a borrowed 2-Meter Warrior. I flew 99.2% of perfect on all 10 minute tasks, beating all the Open class planes as well as the 2-Meter guys. The season ended with the NWSS Tournament, where I again qualified for the finals with my Thunderbird. I was probably the only one flying in the extreme wind without any ballast, and I was happy to just finish the contest with my plane in one piece.

The 1997 contest season got underway with a 2-Meter only contest here in Portland. I was again flying a borrowed plane, this time an Easy Eagle that belonged to Don Pesznecker. He likes to say that it is completely stock, except for the wing, the fuselage and the tail feathers. The conditions were perfect for a lighter plane, and I won. This left just one more win to finish off all the tasks.

My Thunderbird had suffered a serious crash due to radio failure in April, but Ron Wagner helped out with the repairs and it was ready to go again in late June. We traveled to the Tri-Cities for a two day contest over the Fourth of July weekend. The conditions were hot and breezy, which suited the T-Bird well. The plane out launched everything else there, and I was able to range as far as I wanted to find lift and follow it downwind. I ended up winning Open class, as well as the award for Thermal Wizard, which goes to the pilot with the most time in the air. It was a great way to finish up my LSF experience!

This LSF Accomplishment Program has been incredibly helpful for me. It motivated me to set goals, improve my skills and equipment, and take the chances necessary to win contests under tough conditions. I encourage EVERY soaring pilot to get started on Level 1 the very next time you go out flying, and keep pushing yourself until you finish 5. The rewards are huge! ■