

SPORTKITE NEWS

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WHAT MAKES A MASTER CLASS FLYER?

An Interview with Master Class First Place Holder in the Eastern League, Dodd Gross.

The first impression you get meeting Dodd is of someone who respects and cares deeply for sportkite flying. I had a chance to sit down and talk to this Master Class flyer about where the sport has been and where it's going. What has made Dodd stand out as a competitor is his devotion and passion for all aspects of sportkite flying, from being the owner of DJ Sportkites to Judging for the Eastern League and being fully sponsored by Skynasaur Corporation. The day that I interviewed Dodd, he and his wife Jenny had just returned from Seaside, Oregon after competing in the 1993 Grand Nationals.

So what is the news on the western front?

Flying to classical music and using a lot of tricks. Miguel Rodriguez from California is the one flyer most responsible for the classical

music approach using tricks. His style and philosophy toward sportkiting is definitely a predominate factor on the West Coast. There is more emphasis on using tricks than choreography when flying a ballet routine. The pilots out there are very good and we can learn a lot from them.

Sort of like comparing the acrobat to the dancer.

I guess you could say that. Well I don't know. I feel that myself and a few others are responsible for bringing the trick approach to the East Coast, but these tricks have to be done to the music. The trend out there is to use classical music with explosions in the music. And the kite has a lot to do with that. One flyer at Seaside was hitting every beat, and his kite was accentuating that by the sound it was making, the loudness of it. You would think that the noise of the kite would be distracting to the performance, but on (cont. on pg 3)

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURE

An Interview with Dodd Gross. His thoughts on and insight into the sportkite world.....1

DEPARTMENTS

Voice in the Sky
Welcome to SKN.....2

Team Profile
Approaching MOCK 4 at the speed of wind.....4

Skin & Bones
The latest field tips from SKN.....5

Pushing the Envelope
Stalls illustrated.....6

Skywriting
Flying forward.....7

Where to Fly
Where to meet your fellow flyers.....8

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I remember when it happened for me. I was flying at the shore, totally absorbed in some guitar soaring Joe Satriani tune. Unaware that a small crowd had gathered, I was given a small round of applause after I finished flying. Just about everyone was asking "How do you make the kite do that?"

Having the ability to bring a smile to a child's face or to inspire someone to try sportkite flying is one of the many pleasures of this art form. It took me over three years to reach this point. Attending kite festivals and competitions was the only way I learned about sportkites. I eagerly picked up every bit of information I could, but it wasn't easy. There really wasn't information out there that a beginner could understand. Sure, there was plenty of news on competitions or information that experienced flyers would understand, but nothing was available to the beginner on how to do that neat maneuver or finetune equipment.

Well, we believe the wait is over with the launch of Sportkite News.

SKN is the result of my feeling that there is a need to inform, entertain and most of all nurture sportkite flying. The goal is to see the quality and quantity of flyers flourish. Each and every one of us can share a part in bringing the next person to respect and enjoy the art of flying sportkites.

SKN coverage will broaden your knowledge in this ever expanding sport, with feature stories that will bring you the latest inside look at what's hot and exciting in sportkites. Regular departments will show you how to improve both your flying and equipment: **Skin & Bones** will show you the little tweaking that can turn your sportkite into either a hot rod in the sky or a graceful dancer. **Wings & Things** is our product review section, our view of what's in the air or on the ground. **Pushing the Envelope** is like having a private instructor tutoring you through those

sexy moves that can transform your flying from a novice to an experienced pilot. A **Profile** section will introduce you to kiteflyers and builders on the East Coast. And for armchair enjoyment, sit back and read our column called **Skywriting**.

Whether it be a tip on the field, a new maneuver or even a thought, your input is most important to us. Letters to the Editor are welcomed. Sportkite News is your voice in the sky.

Gilbert Velazquez
Publisher



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Editor	John Hawes
Creative Direction	Gilbert Velazquez
Technical Support	Mike Fitzpatrick
Assistant Editor	Donna Velazquez

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(cont. from pg 1) the West Coast they look at the kite as the third instrument of the song. But when you see a ballet performance, you don't hear the "thump" as the dancer hits the stage.

So when you perform on the West Coast I guess you should wear army boots and not ballet slippers.

You got it, they want to hear noise which was what the first seven or eight place holders had, noise. Right now it's noise, classical music and tricks. I think they will start to calm down a bit, concentrating on the choreography. By next year we're going to see an increase in the use of tricks and classical music on the East Coast. I'm seeing Intermediate class flyers doing axle rolls now. It's a simple little spin. It's a cool spin but it's very addictive once you learn it.

Was there any dominant kite out there on the West Coast?

There was a variety of kites such as the California Wasp, Skyburner, Stingers and a few others.

How did you get started flying kites?

My wife and I were vacationing in Cape May [New Jersey] in 1987 and we saw this guy flying a stack of Trlbys. He let me try it and man I was hooked. I immediately sought out the nearest kite store and bought one. The next day I begged my wife to let me buy another one. She said, "Are you crazy!? Sixteen dollars for a kite?". I felt a little uneasy flying brightly colored kites so I bought black ones.

When did you make the jump to competition?

A salesman at the kite shop I frequented said that he was going to the first Mid-Atlantic Stunt Kite Championships in Ocean City. There were only two classes to fly in, Novice or Experienced. Well he felt I was a better flyer than he was, and since he was entering the Experienced class, I did also. After

I completed the compulsories in the precision event, the judges then said OK now go to a freestyle. I said, "What?" In an attempt to do a landing I actually ended up doing a wingtip stand so I held it there. That's when I learned that sometimes one thing can turn into something else on the competition field. My first competition experience got me first place in precision. It was great.

What has been your most unpleasant experience competing?

Certainly the most obvious one was the Grand Nationals in Seaside, Oregon where I didn't place in the top five. But anytime I don't do as well as I think I should or everybody thinks I should that's a low point for me. I realize I'm not Bob Hanson [National Champion]. I'm not as consistent as he is.

How do you look at yourself now?

The way that I look at myself now is that I'm good but I'm not real consistent. I don't know if it's me, the judges or a combination of both. Now I think the best time I ever had was when I beat Bob in Quadline flying a Quadrafoil.

Bob is the guy that I respect most as a flyer. I measure myself up against him. I'm always sticking up for him. Although I don't fly like him, and I don't try to. It's not just Quadline flying that I look at, it's total flying overall.

In competition, you fly pairs with your wife Jenny. Where is she so far in all of this?

Back in the beginning she thought it was stupid. She would be reading a book and I'd play. I thought that maybe if I got her to like flying then we could get more kites. And it worked. (laughter) Before I opened the store I had two Spinoffs one for her and one for me, some Hawaiians and some Flexifoils. We had two of everything so we could fly together. We didn't know any commands but

we always did "follow the leader". Jenny hardly ever flies. But when she goes out, she flies well. At the Grand Nationals she flew in Experienced ballet to a Mariah Carey song. She flew very well. I was really proud of her.

How do you keep yourself from getting bored?

As a matter of fact I do get bored. Before I went to UP Sports [corporate sponsored event] this year in California I was starting to get bored. Then I started Bugging, that's one way to chase the boredom away. I also learned some tricks out there. I've always had done some, snap stalls and stuff like that. But I learned some new ones and that's the only way to keep yourself from getting bored. People buy a kite from me and come back a few months later and say "OK I can land it, launch it and do some circles, there's nothing else to do". I laugh and say can you do a spin landing? Well let me show you how to do one. This is the reason I added Flight School to the back of my new catalog and produced a training video that I made to help flyers sharpen their skills. I know a lot of stuff but I'm so far away from where I should be. As you know as a flyer yourself there's so much to learn. Do something different. Experiment and ask questions.

Do you think we've reached an apex as to what can be done with a dual line sportkite?

I'm sure that when they invented the wheel they didn't think they could go much further, but look at what we have now. We don't know, the future is the future. I'm trying not to get too deep like you do Gil. I think we've reached a certain point with the styles and the designs. But there are subtle differences in material, bridles, aspect ratios and how much camber you put in the sail. You can make a kite fly so many different ways just by trying on different bridles.



FEATURE



What are we going to see at the East Coast Championships year 2000?

Well, to be honest with you I hope there is going to be a sportkite event in the year 2000. As a competitor I think we ought to almost de-emphasize competitions. The reason I say this is because we're not drawing enough people into the sport. But I think we can by turning this more into festivals and following the Europeans. Why can't we do a combination of both? In Europe they'll have ten kite stores set up selling kites for under ten dollars. It is geared mostly for kids but it brings the new people in. We have to follow the festival approach which can attract hundreds or thousands of people. It does in Europe. We need to think bigger. Also, they showcase world-known kite makers like Peter Lynn and Martin Lester.

As far as the U.S. competitions go, the attendance for novice and

intermediate class flyers has been steadily improving, we have to keep people in this sport in order for it to grow. That is the whole idea for these regional events now.

How can manufacturers bring sportkite flying to a larger market?

They need to sponsor more events and try to produce a less expensive kite. Some are trying to do this. You're going to see a lot of kites selling under the hundred dollar mark this year. It all started with the Griffin which was introduced earlier this year.

Where is Dodd Gross in the next five years?

I'll probably be done competing. But my goal is to finish first in Masters on the National Circuit next year. That will probably be my last shot. And I hope that a lot of Master Class competitors will be done with competing and will start judging, giving seminars and demos. The Master Class is the fullest it's ever been. We're start-

ing to see heats in the Master Class now. I would like to see a Pro circuit, but that means we need corporate sponsors, paid unbiased judges and that's a whole other story. My emphasis will be not so much on winning as it has been but on promoting the sport and my store along with Skynasaur who sponsors me. I've always done that but I want to do it more. My immediate concern is to get some kind of a title, I need that validity. I'm so close. Then maybe I'll be one of the first professionally paid judges or a competitor on a Pro circuit. I want to nurture the sport and see it grow.





TEAM PROFILE



Approaching Mock 4

As Winter settles upon the Northeast, a powerful squadron is approaching the Jersey shore at Mock speed. Its flight leader: Captain John Fragale of Bayville New Jersey. At his side: wingmen Keith Brown of Manchester, and Mark Douches from Waretown. But wait I see a fourth aircraft approaching. Veteran pilot Mike Fitzpatrick of Belford is now in the number four position.

Flying modified Stinger 1000's armed with Windsport G Force rods and sponsorship from UP Sports, Kite Studio, New Tech and

Fly Away Kites, MOCK 4 will be a top contender in the Eastern League Experienced Class team event.

In the 1992-93 season MOCK 3 finished Third in Experienced Team Precision on the Eastern League, placing three times overall. Their decision to add a fourth man to their team seemed to be based on several factors. First, most teams in the competition circuit are at least four pilots. Second, looking to strengthen their precision qualities they felt Mike was the man to fill the spot. Mike has known the team for a number of years and personality-wise they connected well. John Fragale believes this to be the most crucial factor in keeping a team mentally healthy, "You all have to get along, and enjoy each others company." Finding the right flight leader is a

trial and error effort. You have to give each team member a try to see who is more comfortable.

The hardest part seems to be for each flyer to technically match the hand controls of each other. Mark Douches feels that consistency is what gives a team the winning advantage on the competition field. Since 1992, Pilot Keith Brown has been President of Monmouth Ocean County Kitefliers, an organization of over 75 flyers in New Jersey.

So what's on the horizon for MOCK 4? Precise, clean routines with a little something special in store for team ballet. An original score made just for them. *Now isn't that nice!*

Now who gets to keep the plaques? We hope that's their only problem next year.

SKIN & BONES

The following two field tips are provided by the Staff of SKN

Tip 1

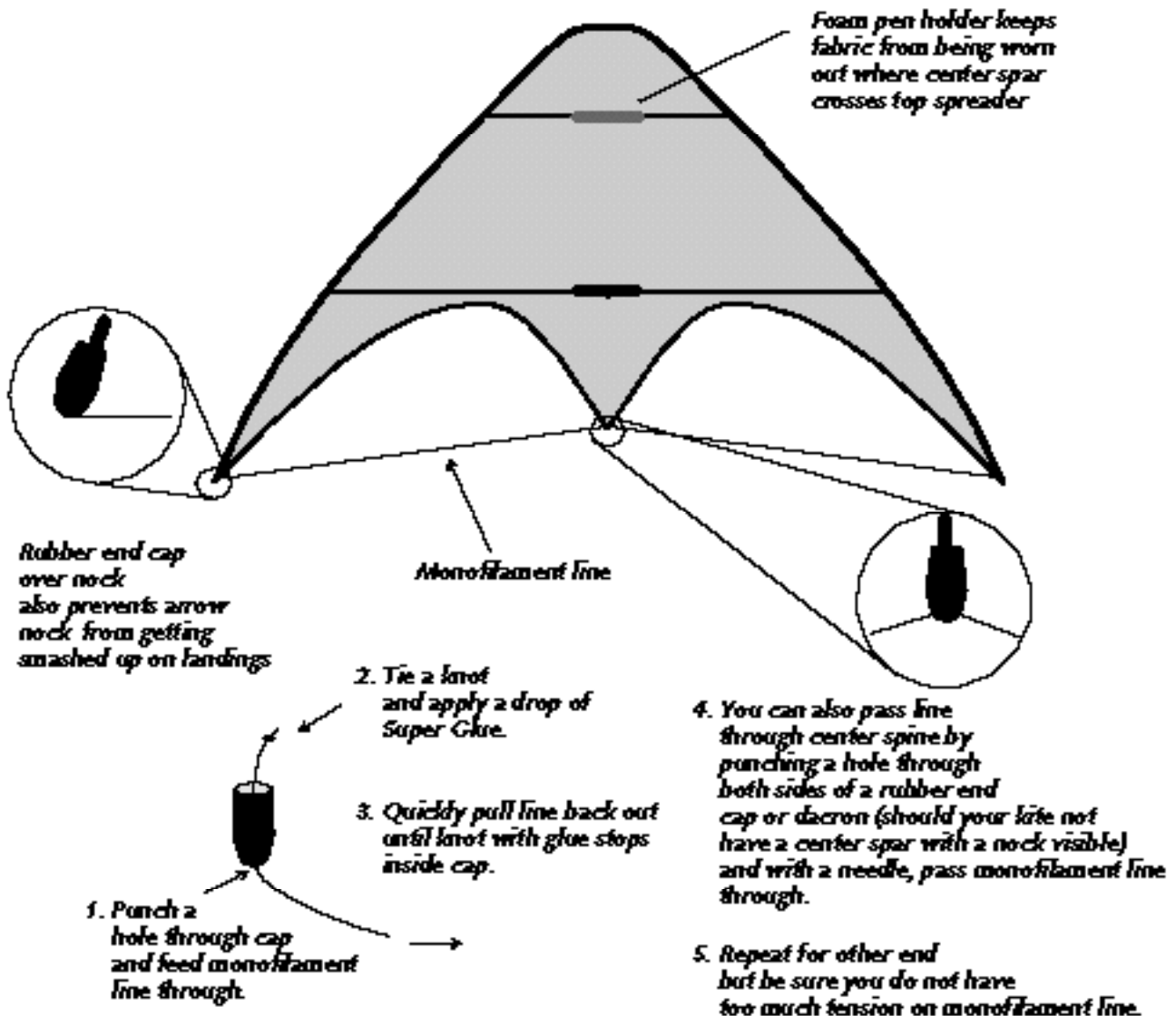
After flying sportkites for awhile, you learn that the sail area becomes worn where the spine and top spreader intersect. Slipping a foam pen holder over the top spreader will eliminate the problem.

Tip 2

Doing many aerial flip overs will usually guarantee your lines will get hung up on some part of your kite unless you run some monofilament line from one wing tip to the other. As opposed to just tying the line from one nock to the next, try the rubber end cap approach as illustrated. The rubber end caps will help to smooth this area considerably, allowing your lines to slide away

free while doing flip overs and other radical maneuvers.

Should you have a neat field tip you would like to share. Send it to SKN and if it's published in our Skin and Bones section, you will receive a check for \$10.00.



Stalls

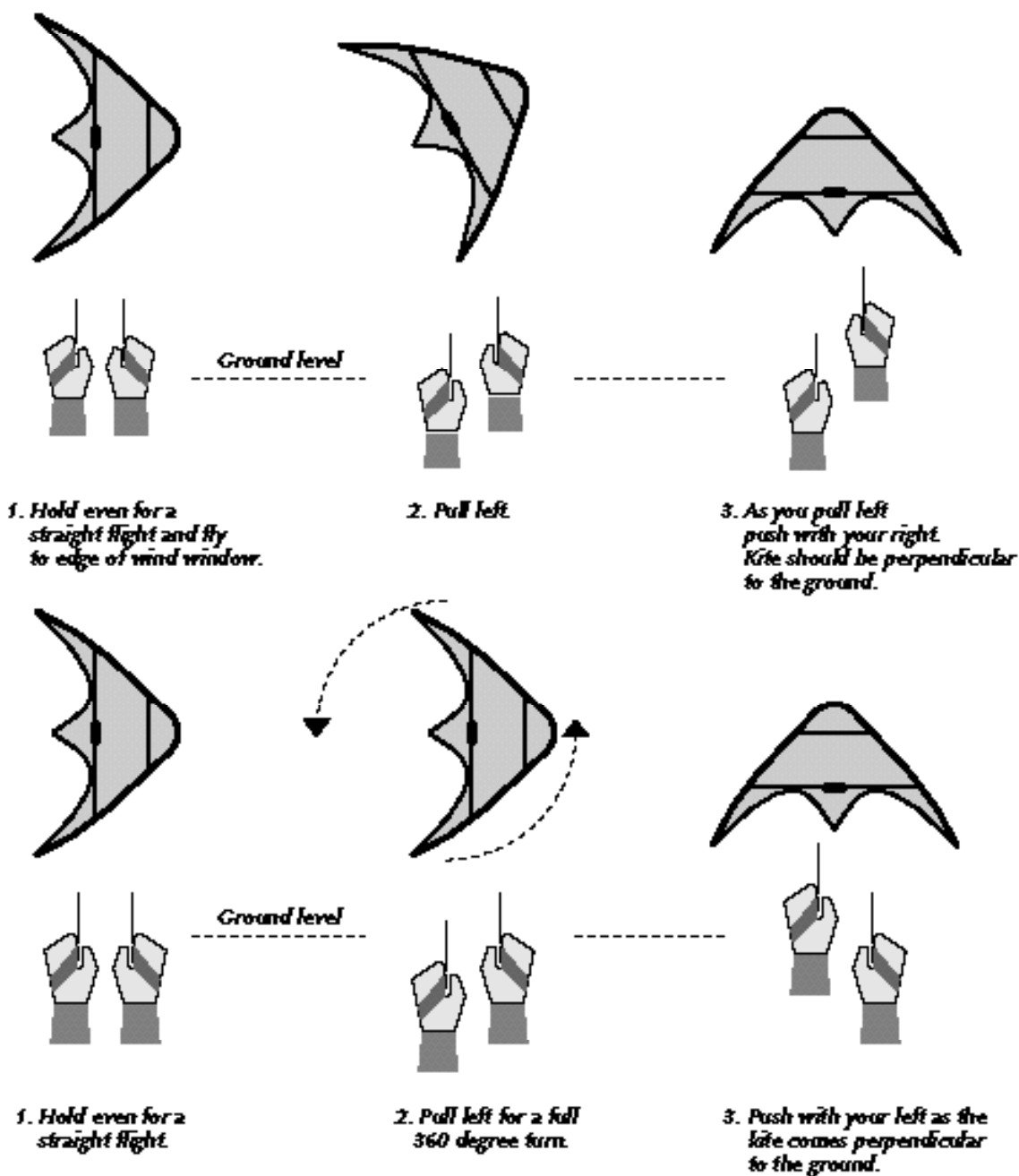
Learning to understand what a controlled stall is will allow the flyer to perform many advanced maneuvers. To simply state, a stall is when the kites lift and drag are balanced. For the technically adept, the condition of an airfoil (sail) where there is a flow breakdown and loss of lift with a tendency to drop.

Snap Stall

You will be dumping air out of the sail very abruptly. Do this maneuver close to the ground.

Spin Stall

Just as a snap stall you will be dumping air out of the sail, but this time you will complete a pull turn and quickly release with your left (push left). Using throttle control by walking backwards or forward you'll gain lift or drop, to induce a landing. Experiment and fly safely



FLYING FORWARD

BY GILBERT VELAZQUEZ

[Reprinted from the Monmouth Ocean County Kitefliers Newsletter-Fall 1993.]

The wind really does have color.

That's what I realized in October of 1991 at Sandy Hook as I was about to compete for the first time in Novice Individual Precision. The sound of the banners and kites rippling through the crisp ocean air spoke a voice all their own. It was unbelievable. I knew this sport would be with me for the rest of my life.

It's been two years since that day and my flying has steadily improved not so much from a technical standpoint but from an expressive one. I'm starting to fly as I feel. I guess I'm ready to move up to the experienced class. **"Oh my God what am I doing?!"**

Each competition has given me something new to work on. It wasn't until Sandy Hook '92 that I first competed in Intermediate Individual Ballet. There was NO WIND. I started out with 80lb line on a brand new Fizz Phantom. A heart attack seemed imminent after running around for the longest three minutes of my life. I learned that short and light is the rule for my lines and moving in all directions is the key. I later found out that some flyers are doing this today in no wind or indoor flying.

After a long winter came the Old Dominion Stunt Kite Championship. (ODSKC 93). It was damp, cold, and muddy. The winds were blowing at 15 mph with gusts up to 20. I had a song that I never really flew to in practice but I had visualized it countless times in my mind. Holding the lines the Tracer seemed to fly on its own - I was there just for the ride. (We'll exclude my not so perfect landing!) When the ballet event was over, I couldn't bring

myself to look at the score sheets. I felt so good about what I did but was afraid of being disappointed. When I saw fellow MOCK member Keith walking toward me smiling, I knew something was up. I had taken first place with a score of 88.2.

It was at the Mid-Atlantic Championship that I realized how wrong things can go in competition. I was the first one up to fly. The winds were 1-3 mph. This time I went to the score sheets myself. **!#?#!**!???? Time to buy that ultralight kite!**

On to the East Coast Championships in Wildwood, New Jersey (ECSKC). This time I prepared both low and high wind routines. By now, I had learned to better articulate the kite to the music. I made it to the finals and took fourth place with the same song I had used in ODSKC. I remember reading an 1992 article by Bob Hanson in *Stunt Kite Quarterly* about soul flying. I didn't know what he was talking about until I flew in the ECSKC finals. A time will come when you actually feel connected to the kite using the music as the catalyst.

The long awaited Newport Championship in Rhode Island was worth the car ride and a blow-out on I-95 to take third in Ballet.

A beautiful weekend descended upon the New York Championships. On Saturday I had to fly in the first heat of the ballet event. Using the same song I flew to in Rhode Island gave me second place in that heat. On to the finals. I took fourth place flying to "Rubina" by Joe Satriani. The highlight of the day was the Magical Mystery Tape Tour. In this event anyone can enter. The only

catch is that the organizers will select a song for you, therefore leaving you only to rely on your interpretive abilities as flyer. I was the last one up in the first heat of 20 flyers. When the field director said "tape is rolling" I thought what am I going to fly to? It was a blast. The song that came on was Billy Joel's "Its only rock and roll to me". It was my best soul flying yet. At the banquet later that night it was announced that I came in third in that heat. Being the only intermediate flyer who made it to the finals, the pressure was on. And indeed it was. On Sunday the winds were variable and light; I was the last flyer up. The music started and I thought "I never heard this song before"! *****!#**!** Later after my performance several spectators came over to me and said they really enjoyed my performance. I came in last, but I had competed against the best sportkite flyers in the country.

We now come full circle and as I write this, Sandy Hook is just around the corner. **If there is NO WIND this time I'm ready!**[*Sandy Hook Championships 1992*] This event means a lot to me for two reasons. One, this is where it all started for me several years ago. And two, Sandy Hook will be my last event this year. I guess I'm feeling the start of sportkite depression.

But before the doldrums set in, I want to say it has been a great year competing and I'm looking forward to next season. One of the most valued things in this sport is the love and passion so many of us share for it.

Let the wind be at your back and may you always see the color of the wind.





Where to Fly

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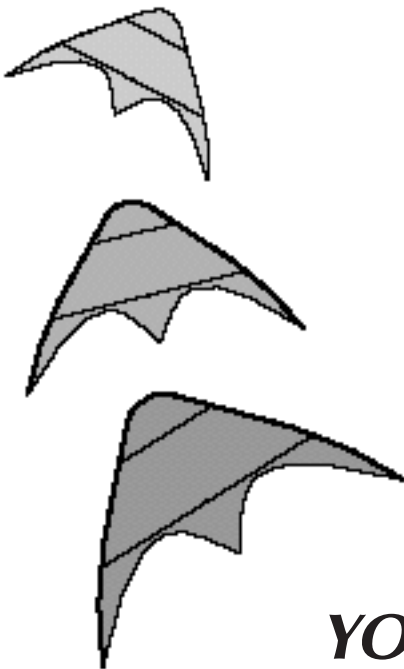
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1/1

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