Derek Godfrey and the Parafoil on target in 2003 PHOTO: MARTIN ROBE

... and again in 2005 PHOTO: CLAIRE GODFREY

Reigning Classic Accuracy National Champion (and two-times winner) Derek Godfrey gives an insight into how he makes a target approach on his Parafoil 282

A typical competition flight... what do I think about? It's the last round of the competition and the weather is holding, so we should be able to complete the round. I am still in with a chance, so this last flight is really important.

There are another 15 pilots to fly before it's my turn - about half an hour. I had better watch another couple of flights - especially the Foils and Classics - to see what the conditions are doing at the target. Is there any wind shear and/or wind gradient? If so I might need to adjust my approach. What about thermals? There's not much I can do about them - I just have to be ready if I get hit by one low down.

I take a quick look at the scores. I like to know what the competition are doing and what I need to score. A lot of people don't want to know, but I thrive on the pressure. I would also be gutted to re-jump a winning score without knowing it and then blow it.

Which side of the target are we being towed towards? Are we being forced to release close to the target? I've now got a reasonable picture of the conditions - I know roughly where I want to release and I have a basic flight plan.

I walk back to the launch point in plenty of time to find my kit and prepare. I report to the launch marshal and find out where I am in the stack. Now into my routine...

Put on my really uncomfortable shoes with the home-made target heel, track-pants tucked into socks to stop them flapping around. A few stretches to get the old body moving. Lay out my canopy... no help, thanks.

Helmet and sunglasses on (yellow lenses if it is really dark or dull), and practice pad out for a minute of footwork. Yes, I know I look stupid, but it helps me focus - and I don't get to practice my footwork at any other time!

Harness on when there are just two more to fly in front of me. I make sure my leg straps are even and my back strap tucked in, and my steering lines are completely free. The routine is helpful but it isn't essential - I don't do this at the club site and I still get to the target, so don't worry if you don't get a chance to go through it all.

Now I am next to fly. I have my basic flight plan in mind, but if I have to change it so be it. But now there is a delay. Why does it always happen to me? The Land Rover has got a problem and it's going to be a while to sort it. Sit down and relax!

Ready to go again. Have the winds changed much? (it is now about 45 minutes since I left the target). I'm not sure, so I get the launch-marshal to radio for latest windspeed.

"Ready in harness!" "Ready wing-tips!" "Up slack!" and we are off. Now I am taking on as much information as I can about the conditions. Did I have to run much at take-off? How fast is the vehicle travelling, and does it suddenly change as we hit a wind shear/gradient? (If so, how high am I - I'll need to be ready for that on the way down.) Look at the target windsock and streamer - is it steady or flicking around?

I don't let myself get right on top of the target. I need a bit of width to the side of the target, so I steer a bit if necessary. Concentrate on the target... gone just past it now. Am I still gaining height? Am I getting taken too far past? I want to make sure I have maximum height for finals, hence more time to get the canopy settled and get myself into exactly the right position. I signal for release and check that the line has gone.

Now a penetration check to assess how much forward speed I am getting. This will help me work out where to make the all-important final turn. Turn downwind straight away to get to finals as soon as possible. My eyes lock on and stay on the target for the rest of the flight, except to glance at the windsock to find the wind-line. (I only use the windsock to tell me the wind-line, not the strength, because every windsock is different. I judge the windspeed purely on what I am experiencing in the air.)

A few deep breaths to clear the mind. Now a bit of width to assess when to start the final turn. Once you have turned through 90 degrees, assess your drift and use this information, and the information about the windspeeds at the target and from the penetration check, to decide when to go to finals. Make sure you are hot (on the upwind side of the perfect glide angle) and don't forget to factor-in any wind shear/gradient that you detected.

2006 Accuracy Calendar

The following dates have been added to the calendar published in Dead Centre last month and appear in the Skywings calendar at the back of the magazine:

-May 13 - 14	European Accuracy Grand Prix	France	arthur.bentley@virgin.net	
June 24 - 25	Classic Accuracy Competition	Horst, Belgium	huub.coumans@planet.nl	
Date TBA	National PG Accuracy Championships	Location TBA	chrishaynes@birdwings.fsnet.co.uk	0044 1235 534853
Date TBA	Birdwings Classic Accuracy Competition	South Cerney, Cirencester	arthur.bentley@virgin.net	
Aug 26 - 28	National Classic Accuracy Championships	Location TBA	arthur.bentley@virgin.net	
Sept 2 - 3	European Accuracy Grand Prix	Rotterdam, Holland	arthur.bentley@virgin.net	

Now the crucial bit. Do I head straight to the wind-line (Route A on the diagram). I may be very hot... do I allow myself to fly along a base leg and possibly past the wind-line (Route C on the diagram), losing height and allowing myself to drift downwind slightly so that when I commit to the wind line my approach angle will be less?

This is where the width I achieved on the downwind leg is so important - it means the difference in my approach angle - from heading straight to the wind-line or if I go across the base leg and drift downwind - is considerable. And I can choose anywhere in between.

If you are in any doubt that you might be getting cold (getting so far downwind that you may not be able to reach the target), turn to the target and commit to the wind-line. The earlier you get to this point the better - it gives you more time to find the right glide angle to come in on half-brakes. This is the perfect position - you can let up if you get hit by a gust or you can apply more brake if the wind drops out on you.

Because you have turned in hot you should be able to find this position by sitting on more brake and sliding the canopy back - somewhere around three-quarter brakes or more if necessary. This is where the Parafoil really comes into its own, as you can sit in really deep brake for several seconds without going into stall, whilst staying really stable. You can't do this on some other parascending canopies and you certainly should not do it on a paraglider. But all the years of practice on the airfield mean I have absolute confidence in where my stall point is - how to feel the stall starting and how to come out of stall without losing any control.

Now let the canopy settle. If it is bumpy try to ride the bumps, keeping the brake inputs to a minimum to keep it really smooth. At about 75ft I like to apply more brake for a couple of seconds to get myself slightly colder, so that from 50ft to 20ft I can come in with a bit more drive and airspeed. I can then convert this in the last few feet to slow my final approach onto the target. Ideally, at 10ft I am almost vertically above the disc (that's what the eye is focused on now) and about a foot to the left, as I like to use my right heel. By converting the extra airspeed in the last few feet the final approach is slightly slower, buying me precious time to place my foot more precisely.

In the last 2ft lift the non-striking foot well out of the way (to make the judges' life easier and ensure they do not question which foot landed first), and make sure you place the other foot - don't stab at it. A lot of people like to aim using their heel as a sighter, but not me. I just put my foot down - it's instinctive. I can't even tell you how I do it.

I have a habit of looking straight for the electronic scoreboard. Some people have told me they think I am looking at it as I land, but I'm not quite sure about that!

Are you happy with the score? (Remember, I know the other competitors' scores before I take off, so I know what I would be happy with). If you are not happy with the score, ask yourself whether you had a fair shot at it. Did you get plenty of time to settle the canopy on finals. If so, sign for your score and then go and think about how you could have done better.

If you don't think you had a fair shot, ask the judges if you had sufficient time. Were there any other factors that upset your approach? Don't be afraid to sit quietly for a moment or two to think it through before signing for your score, but don't let anyone speak to you or cloud your opinion. Once you have signed for your score, relax and enjoy!

So there you have it. There's a lot of thinking to do and factors to account for. But remember... at the end of the day, it's only a game!

At the decision point - if I am cold I will take A at full drive to go straight to finals. If I am hot I can sit on my brakes and take route C - drifting downwind following a much longer route and losing height all the time. The difference in height and hence my approach angle at the start of finals will be radically different. And of course I can take any route in between such as route B.