

Accuracy photography

ANDY WEBSTER DISCUSSES TAKING ACCURACY PHOTOGRAPHS AT THE TARGET

I am no expert on photography and I have never been on a photography course, but I have taken many photographs of the sport over the years and can share some of the techniques I have developed for taking accuracy shots.

Lighting is very important, and the best photos are generally taken when there is plenty of sunlight. However, shooting in the direction of the sun will usually put an object in shadow so it is best to position yourself shooting away from the sun. Sometimes you can get lucky shooting in the direction of the sun, capturing light falling through a glider without the pilot being in too much in shadow. An overcast day generally results in dull photos that are not inspiring to look at.

At the target it is best to photograph a pilot flying towards you, so that you can see their face and the open cells of a glider. A photograph of the back a wing doesn't look as good. When taking photos there are options to take a close-up of just the pilot landing on the target, or standing further back and photographing both the pilot and wing on the target. Arthur Bentley is master of the pilot close-ups, whereas my personal preference is for the pilot and wing combination which offers more colour.

In Classic Accuracy photographers can get close to the tuffet and take good quality photos without the need to operate the camera zoom. However, in Paragliding Accuracy there is generally a spectator line marking the boundary of the landing field that cannot be crossed, requiring the camera's zoom function to be operated. The trouble with using the zoom is that the photo will blur more easily and will never be as good as if you were close in on the subject matter. The only way round this is to get an expensive camera with a big lens - or sneak into the landing field without looking too conspicuous.

A close-up shot presents a good opportunity to see modified footwear reaching for the 2cm yellow dot of the electronic pad, and can look really impressive if the foot and dot are close together. The ultimate accuracy photograph is probably when you are able to capture the pilot's foot just touching the electronic pad, with the electronic scoreboard in view displaying a score. Capturing a still-inflated wing in the view can make a photo even more impressive. Such shots are all about timing and are not easy to take. It is best to hit the camera button when a pilot's foot appears to be approximately one foot (300mm) above the electronic pad, and sometimes you get it spot-on. Alternatively you can use a camera's burst mode function, if yours has one, to get multiple shots.

Taking accuracy photos is not all about capturing a pilot's foot millimetres from the pad, and getting a photo of a pilot a few feet above the target can be just as good. Also a photo with an element of action in it, for

Photo: Andrew Webster

example a pilot reaching sideways for the target, can also make a good photo.

Another aspect of photographing a landing is that it is best to see the pilot's face in the photo. This is not always possible as pilots are generally looking downwards at the target centre. I have taken lots of well-timed photographs, only to find I have a photo of the top of a pilot's helmet - which won't get published in Skywings! The high tuffet in Classic Accuracy makes it easier to get a face shot as you are generally shooting in an upwards direction close into the target. However this is more difficult in Paragliding Accuracy when the target is on the ground and the photographer is generally stood further away. Two ways around this are to take a photo when the pilot is a few feet above the target, or take a photo with an

element of side view, as more face will be visible if a pilot is looking downwards.

As mentioned earlier, an expensive camera with a big lens will get round some issues with zooming in on the subject matter, and will also offer good quality photos. However it is difficult to take a large camera on an aeroplane or up a hill launch with all your paragliding equipment. I use a Sony DSC WX50, a good quality compact camera, due to its portability.

If you are ever at a loose end at an accuracy competition, try taking some photos at the target. It can be really rewarding when you capture a good one. Also send any good ones off to Skywings, or to me and I can put them on the bhpa-accuracy.org.uk website gallery.



Katie Sykes' 12cm captured very well by Arthur Bentley



A TOUCH OF M

The ingredients are classic... unremarkable: 59 cells, A.R... well proven profile. Yet the... unexpectedly EXO

The Explorer 2 simply allo... reconnect with the pure joy... struggling with the wing. N... doubts. Just the direct exper... snapping into f

