Sport Kite

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Getting Started as a

Sport Kite Competitor



By Susan Skinner

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www.aka.kite.org aka@aka.kite.org 1-800-252-2550 Becoming a sport kite competitor is an easy and rewarding way to enjoy your new sport kite and to meet fellow kitefliers.

The first step in getting started as a sport kite competitor is to have a sport kite you know how to fly. Whether it is a dual-line kite or a multi-line kite is up to you. It just depends which type of kite you prefer. It is recommended you pick one type to start out and then after you have developed some proficiency with it, try the other type if you wish. Yes, most competitors start with the dual-line, but you don't have to. Go with what you will be happy doing. There is of course no substitute for practice to build your skill. If you are looking for help on how to fly, there are several books and videos available. Check with your local kite shop or one of the Internet kite stores.

Step two is go to the American Kiteflier Association website (www.aka.kite.org) and download the current rulebooks for sport kites. Make sure you download all four books: International Sport Kite Competition Rules, International Sport Kite Judges' book, International Sport Kite Compulsories Book, AKA Appendix to the International Sport Kite Rules Books. While you are there, you should join the AKA if you are not already a member. Most sport kite competitions require you to be an AKA member, and this is the only way to get AKA Conference points, which can lead to an invite to the AKA Grand Nationals! Once

you have the rulebooks, read all of them completely. It's a good idea to print a copy and keep it in your kite bag. If you are unsure about something in one of the books, ask an experienced competitor in your area or email sportkite@aka.kite.org. The AKA also has forums on its website where you can chat with other kitefliers.

What's next? Practice the precision figures in the compulsories book that match the type of kite you are flying. Include calling "in" and "out" as part of your practice. Forgetting to make the calls is a common error in the beginning. An event must post the figures it will use 30 days in advance so this will help you with your practice. Practice your technical routine. While it can vary in length from one to three minutes you should aim for a routine that is about 2:30 long. Practice it in different winds, which will change how much you can do in the time allowed. Variation is important, the same maneuver over and over will not show the judges the breadth of your skill. Aim to show the judges consistent control of the kite through different types of maneuvers. During the competition the field director will give you a warning when you are reaching the maximum time.

For the Ballet, you need to pick music. Make sure it's music you like (you will be listening to it a lot) but also has broad appeal and would be acceptable to most people. Also because competitions are in a public park, make sure your music is tasteful for all ages. Your music must be 2 to 4 minutes in length; 3:40 would be a good target to shoot for. If you are using a CD make sure it will play in any CD player. If you are using a cassette tape make sure you cue it properly and also don't cut the max time too closely as different tape players play at slightly different speeds. Decide the key elements of your routine and then fill in around them. Once again there is no substitute for practice.

"But don't I need an expensive sport kite to compete?" you ask. Not to get started, but generally speaking, a professional-grade kite flies better than an entry-level kite. As your skills progress you may want to consider moving up to a professional-grade sport kite. When you are ready to purchase a new kite, make sure you try it out first. Find a kite dealer or friend who will give you a test flight or two. Just because the kite is expensive doesn't mean it's the right kite for you. Each kite has its pros and cons. A great trick kite may not fly a good straight line. One kite may fly a great straight line but pull too hard. Try out several to see which one works best for you. When you do pick a new kite remember to give yourself time to get used to it. Techniques for doing tricks and landings can vary from kite to kite and you may need to change your style to match the kite. Never walk into competition with equipment you are not familiar with. Also make sure all your equipment is in good

condition to limit the possibility of equipment failure. Always fly with safety in mind. Never fly with broken equipment or over the heads of other people.

What do I do at the event? Review the rulebook, just before you go. When you arrive, check in and register. (Many events require advance registration). If you are flying a dual-line kite, you will be registering in Novice Individual Ballet (NIB) and Novice Individual Precision (NIP). If you are flying a multi-line kite, you will be registering in Experienced Individual Multi-line Ballet (EMB) and Experienced Individual Multi-line Precision (EMP). The multi-line events were formerly called quad-line, and it is not uncommon to still hear them called this at events. At most events, if you tell them this is your first competition, they will ask another kiteflier to help you with the process throughout the day. Pay close attention to announcements and watch for schedule changes to be posted. Remember "kite time" runs at the speed of the wind, not the clock, so an event may be ahead or behind the posted schedule based on the winds of the day. Introduce yourself to the other fliers and ask someone to be your ground crew while you are competing. If you have any questions the organizers are always willing to help. Make sure you attend the fliers meeting at the start of the competition.

At 99% of the kite competitions volunteers will be running the competition. These volunteers are themselves kitefliers. You will find that competitors are the judges, field directors and other staff needed to run the event. Volunteer and get involved. Field directing may be a good place to start. Also, ask about shadow judging. Not only will learning to judge help you do your share at the competition, but you will find it will improve your own performance when you understand how to look at the performance from the judge's point of view.

Lastly, remember to have fun! Sport kite flying is a great hobby and sport, which provides challenge, excitement and camaraderie for the participants.

American Kitefliers Association

For more information on sport kite competitions go to www.aka.kite.org or email sportkite@aka.kite.org