

10 YEARS FREE FLIGHT IN GERMANY - FACTS AND FIGURES

By Gerhard Wöbbecking

Having served ten years leading the German Free Flight Subcommittee, at the end of 2008 I declared my resignation from the post in order of focussing on my CIAM duties and my journalistic ambitions in the field of aero modelling.

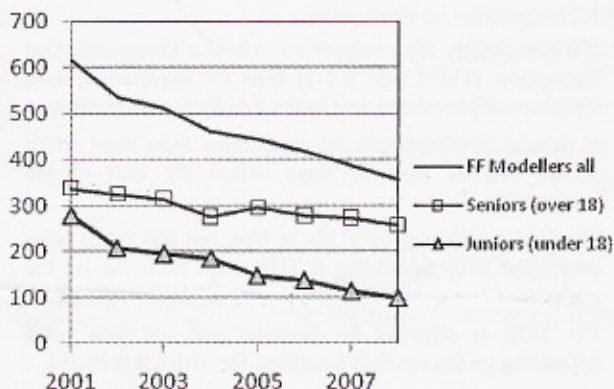
Within one decade the free flight scene in Germany changed considerably. The change can be shown with figures which had been asked and saved since I got in charge. Some of the figures may surprise, but most just underline guesswork of insiders. One of the phenomena is a real pity and influences several other shifts and changes: Regular teaching of young boys and girls in building and flying model aircrafts nearly ceased within the aero modelling clubs, and has yet not been substituted by working groups in the upcoming all-day schools in Germany. Free flight gliders had been the choice for the former, quite popular education, taking the low price of the kits and the simple design of the models into account. In the following, the

number of participants in the traditional UhuCup-Competitions for pupils up to 16 dropped significantly. For some reasons, neither the free flight part of these Uhu-competitions nor their participants had been counted as the activities of the German free flight subcommittee.

In Germany, the central Aero Club has little power compared to the Aero Clubs of the 16 counties. According to their constitution, these county-based organisations are the members of the DAeC; a single aero modeller is a member of one of them, not of the central organisation. That federal construction leaves much to be desired, but in our special case it offers quite a chance to gain reliable figures. The German Free Flight Subcommittee (Fachausschuss) consists mainly of county-representatives responsible for our sport (Freiflugreferenten). Since 2001 I asked them year by year to fill in a standardized form in order to conduct a survey on the numbers of active flyers and regional competitions. These are the numbers, summarized.

Free Flight Modellers in Germany 2001 – 2008

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
FF Modellers all	615	533	510	460	441	415	386	355
Seniors (over 18)	337	325	315	276	295	278	273	257
Juniors (under 18)	278	208	195	184	146	137	113	98



A continuously fading number of active free flight modellers can be observed in all western countries with a developed aero modelling scene, especially in big ones like the US, Great Britain and France. But the figures of Germany demonstrate what has been mentioned. In opposite to some other countries, till 2003/2004 we could always count on a good quantity of youngsters competing in our national glider classes, often growing out of the UhuCup-scene. But since 2004, the juniors are continuously leaving our flying fields, reducing the overall number of free flight activists. On the other hand, many of them – having outgrown their junior-age – continued flying as seniors, permanently compensating the natural passing of elder citizens.

Scrutinizing the reasons goes beyond the scope of this report. But with the following three speculations one can't be wrong:

- When the traditional groups within the clubs decreased, families stepped in. As a matter of fact, this can be observed at every national or international competition with juniors. Because there aren't that many families performing well in free flight sport, the overall number of junior participation decreased. At the same time the performance of the top flyers, promoted by parents or grandparents, remained on a very high level.
- Free flight itself is in question as a normal (sane) model flying activity. RC equipments are cheaper to obtain than free flight ones and offer a lot of fun independent of big flying fields. Ambitious juniors continue to F3K (Hand Launch Glider), F3J (RC Soaring) or F3P (Indoor Aerobatics). Watched while chasing a model aircraft

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disappearing at the horizon one seems to be regarded as insane.

- Fewer areas are usable as free flight flying fields. Juniors on their own – per definition they don't own a licence to drive a car - find no space to test a model which is not radio controlled. And even worse: While the fields got fewer and smaller, new technique stimulated the performance of the free flight models, permanently increasing the height for the beginning of the glide. Even the full size glider fields, situated in Germany almost everywhere, don't fulfil the requirements for training under moderate windy conditions.

The figures showing the participation at the German FF Junior Nationals underline the thesis.

Participation of Pupils (up to 14) + Juniors (up to 18) at German FF Junior Nationals (Plain)

Year	F1A-J	F1H-J	F1A	F1B	F1J/P	F1H	Wings F1H-N	Uhu Glider	Totals
2000	14	19	17	3	0	14	5		72
2001	12	20	18	8	2	13	3		76
2002	11	26	24	7	2	13	7		90
2003	10	18	21	7	3	14	5		78
2004	12	9	30	7	2	13	1	1	75
2005	6	7	24	7	3	12			59
2006	5	3	23	5	3	14			53
2007	0	5	12	4	3	13		5	42
2008	9	14	12	3	3	5		4	50

The classes F1A-J und F1H-J (models of A2- und A1-size traditionally built with simple, not moving hooks reserved for pupils up to 14) get through a crisis (shaded) since 2004. Reason behind is the fact, that youth groups of clubs stopped participating in the Junior Nationals with club built wooden models. On the other hand, youngsters are able to circle tow modern F1A, and families aiming to attend international junior contests with their children have no interest in models too simple to be competitive for gathering World Cup points or to serve for the qualifying for international championships.

The figures regarding seniors attending the German FF Nationals (plain only, neither indoor nor slope) look different. They suit the almost stable number of senior free flight activists shown in the overall statistics. One remark: after 2001, we changed the rhythm of a two years cycle of Nationals to a year by year one, a measurement, which decreased the numbers of participation immediately.

Participation of Seniors (> 18) at German FF Nationals (Plain)

Year	F1A	F1B	F1C/P	F1H	wings/ F1H-N	F1Q	SLOP/ F1C-X	F1G	F1J	F1K	P-30	Classics	Total
1999	79	28	14	31	7	2	3	8	1	4			177
2001	71	34	21	24	4	2	4	2	3	2		7	174
2002	76	33	20	15	5		4						153
2003	69	27	24	24	5		4	2	2		2		159
2004	74	32	19	21	3		3	1			3		156
2005	70	30	16	25	4		2	3			3	2	155
2006	73	26	19	24	cancelled								142
2007	71	29	21	22	2		2				2	1	150
2008	78	24	16	16	3	7					2		146

Between the Nationals in 1999 and in 2008 we state a loss of 31 participations, 28 within the "small" classes without international championships and only 3 within F1A,B,C. After changing to the one year cycle, the Nationals became one of the qualifying contests, and the competitors started to concentrate on their performance in F1A B C, ignoring the other classes.

In 2008, first time F1P flyers were allowed to participate with F1P alongside F1C, according to the new rule for World Cup events. Some F1C pilots therefore refused to participate, forcing the German FF Subcommittee to reduce the motor run to 5 sec for F1P attending the F1C Nats in 2009. But in the long run, power flyers will get used to compete with models of both classes, F1P and F1C in one contest. In 2008 F1Q attracted 7 participants, and future will show modellers leaving F1C in pursuit of the advantages of electricity.

Interesting and a German speciality is a good attendance at class F1H. After CIAM in 1993 increased the weight limit from 180 to 220 grams, the FF SC refused to adopt the rule for Germany, releasing any weight limit. The only open German FF class of importance was created, offering light built A1 a fair chance against high-tech F1H constructions made in Ukraine. We wonder why other nations followed the wrong decision CIAM took in defining a small class, which easily can be built lighter without any disadvantage (for instance too high the performance).

As a matter of fact, 70 per cent of all seniors - counted because they are engaged in free flight – participate in our three nationals for plain, slope and indoor.

And what about the rest? What about the pupils and juniors not attending their nationals? They are used to flying at regional contests. The number of these FF events in the counties increased between the years 2004 and 2008 and reflect a good performance of the FF organizers within the ten most active county-based Aero Clubs:

Free Flight Activities in Germany 2001 to 2008

Year	FF modellers total	Senior (>18)	Junior (<18)	Clubs with FF	regional	regional	national +	F1	national	international
					champs	contests	internat contests	indoor contests	contests	contests
					F1 plain	F1 plain	F1E slope	F1D etc.	F1 plain	F1 plain
2001	615	337	278	84	10	52	12	5	3	2
2002	533	325	208	81	10	50	14	4	3	2
2003	510	315	195	80	10	49	15	5	3	2
2004	460	276	184	82	10	63	19	3	3	2
2005	441	295	146	79	10	65	19	5	3	2
2006	415	278	137	74	10	62	15	4	3	3
2007	386	273	113	82	9	66	18	5	3	2
2008	355	257	98	74	9	52	18	4	4	1

Are these FF activists internationally competitive? Do satisfying national results correspond to good places within international contests? Yes, they do!

Taking the FF World Cup events, the 2008 results show Germany in the lead, with 40 competitors gaining points in two competitions at least. Next nations were Russia (28 competitors) and France (27 competitors).

I counted also the medals won at European and World Championships since 2000. German flyers got 9 medals of 108 in class F1A, 5 of 108 in F1B, 6 of 108 in F1C+F1J/P, 6 of 96 in F1D and 11 of 108 in F1E. In sum, from 2000 to 2008 they won 37 medals of 528, that's a margin of 7 per cent. Because of F1E, the number of successes might be slightly above the average of other participating nations.

Despite some drawbacks and less advantageous developments, free flight is still going strong in Germany.