



# APOGEE

## PEAK OF FLIGHT

### NEWSLETTER

## Is Political Correctness Correct?

By Tim Van Milligan

*Note: This article is about competition, and the direction it may be heading. It is purely an opinion piece, so I'll understand if you decide to skip it and read something more interesting.*

Recently, Mark Bundick, the President of the NAR put out a challenge. That challenge was to get greater participation in competition. He writes:

"The NAR President is concerned (and has been) about the relative size of the NAR competition community for years. On a statistical basis, it's remained around 300-350 folks every year since I've been President. The people involved in competition are generally intensively involved and committed to the activity, both as users and managers of it. However, when a community is this size, it's a bit difficult to insure the long term sustainability of such a group. If we're going to generate more stability and activity, the group needs to become bigger."

Mark is right on when he says that the group must become larger. But if new people are taking up competition, why isn't it getting larger? It must mean that some people are also exiting from competition. Why is this?

I'd like to offer one scenario. It may not be absolute because it is only based on a few comments that I've heard from just a few old-time competitors. But it is certainly plausible.

Over the past decade, there has been an unofficial, but systematic program in place to make it easier for new modelers to start competing. The method chosen is to: 'make it easier for new modelers to win events.' I guess the theory is that if it is easier for a newbie to win an event, that they'll be more likely to want to compete in the first place. And hopefully by them winning the event, they'll become more involved in it and encourage others to compete too.

This certainly sounds like a reasonable theory; and many people have embraced it.

However, by working under the guidelines of this theory, how do you make it easier for a newbie to win an event?

Easy. You eliminate anything that requires exceptional craftsmanship, resourcefulness, strategy, preparation, and determination. In effect, you eliminate everything from the competition but "luck." By doing this, it is believed that you have leveled the playing field for everyone.

I have seen more and more contests where everyone must use the same model. An example is the Estes' Alpha parachute duration contest. Another is a push to bring back so called "classic/retro" events -- where everyone must use the same motor.

My questions is: "Is this the right way to increase participation in contests?"

Does anyone notice that grizzly old veterans don't show up for these events? I noticed. I was told by one veteran that these types of "boring" events don't interest him.

In the past, what made contests fun for these veterans wasn't the winning. It was the personal challenges that they had to overcome. They weren't just competing against others; but they were competing against themselves.

What made competitions a personal challenge was that the event rules allowed freedom to try different things. They weren't hamstrung by people trying to level the playing field. What challenge is it to build an Alpha rocket? But there is a challenge in trying different methods, different materials, and different flying strategies.

Where the rules of the competition allow vast experimentation, there is still a lot of possible variation that is available. An example of this is the NAR's R&D event. But the "politically correct" see this event as something that stands in the way of the newbie having chance to win a National Championship trophy. You can't win R&D with "luck." It takes hard work and determination. So there have been several attempts to eliminate the event, or at least reduce its importance.

Another example of personal challenge was the C.A.T.S.



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prize. Even everyday modelers were really following what was going on. It's rules allowed lots of variation, which was only controlled by the people that chose to participate. It did generate a lot of excitement.

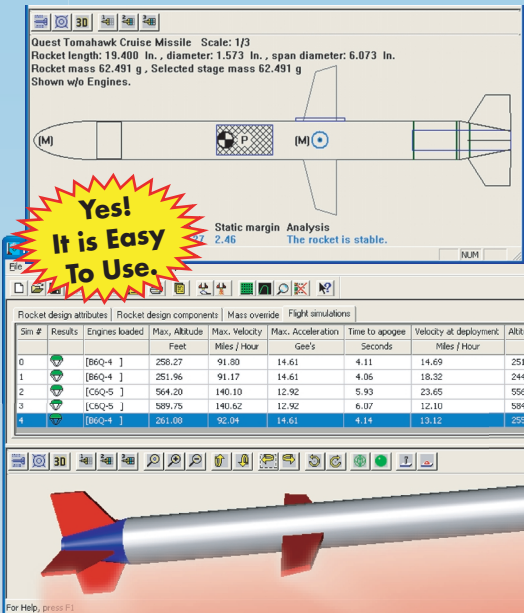
In conclusion, this article is just an opinion. I'm throwing out for discussion some observations that I have made. I don't know if competition is stagnating because of the current climate of "political correctness." But some comments I have heard from the old veterans may be worth consideration.

After all, if newbie modelers are going to get better, it will be because some veteran gave them some training. But if the veterans aren't there, who will train them? And who will

be left promote the concept of 'competition?'

### About the Author:

Tim Van Milligan is the owner of Apogee Components (<http://www.apogeerockets.com>) and the curator of the rocketry education web site: <http://www.apogeerockets.com/education>. He is also the author of the books: "Model Rocket Design and Construction," "69 Simple Science Fair Projects with Model Rockets: Aeronautics" and publisher of the FREE e-zine newsletter about model rockets. You can subscribe to the e-zine at the Apogee Components web site, or sending an email to: [ezine@apogeerockets.com](mailto:ezine@apogeerockets.com) with "SUBSCRIBE" as the subject line of the message.




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2	[CSQ-6 ]	564.30	140.10	12.92	5.93	23.65	556.31	4.30	
3	[CSQ-6 ]	589.75	140.62	12.92	6.07	12.10	584.67	4.44	
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