

1st International Gliding Competition for Women LESZNO – Poland 1973



So 1973 Leszno was waiting for this female “invasion”. Where in the 18. Century the Prussian King Friedrich the Great had met with the famous French philosopher Voltaire, this rendez-vous 1973 gathered a quite different society: 21 women gliding pilots from 12 countries (this time **with** representation of the West) on the large airfield of Leszno. Judging on the friendly look on their faces, one would think they have known each other since years.

The longest travel to Leszno? Sue Martin from Australia and the Americans Henriette Freese and Britt Floden, incidentally respectively of Dutch and Swedish origin.

Nice welcome gesture: all pilots were offered free of charge the use of a PIRAT, the same glider for all, maybe not quite the same conditions for all because the Western pilots were hardly familiar with this Polish glider. However, Leszno thus practiced the general principle of “equal chances, equal material”, since years required by the International Olympic Committee. The IOC has always refused to include gliding in the Olympic Programme, because competitors did not “fight with the same weapons”.



This Olympic wish was also one of the reasons why FAI invited glider constructors to compete in a contest aiming at the final choice of a “world class glider”. Professor Piero Morelli was entrusted with chairmanship of the pertinent Selection Committee.

Final choice was Polish PW 5. But until today gliding has still not become an Olympic sport and it will most probably never be.

So, Leszno 1973: ALL on Pirat.

Both DDR women Morgner und Warstat were launched in Schönhagen – Berlin in double tow – a very long tow indeed via Frankfurt a/Oder (airspace limitations!) to finally reach Leszno. Imagine: **250 km in double tow!**

We were all quite impressed. Belgian Geogeo Litt who participated in the very first competition of her life, immediately decided: “THEY will be my locomotives”!

Many of the competing pilots experienced the very first double tow adventure in their pilot lives after landing out on a Polish field – and yes, also free of charge. Of course, this was nothing like the 250 km tow of both DDR girls!

Can you imagine more beautiful championship? **nine contest days**, of which twice a 500 km.task was set. Don't forget: on Pirat, L:D 1/31! Most of the time Director Josef Dankowski lived up to his optimistic reputation, announcing “a somewhat big task” and of course often he had to be satisfied with less kilometres, usually by changing the imposed triangle into a return flight on the last leg. Nine contest days. How can I summarize? I just can't resist reporting on each day.

1. Contest day: task 322 km became 187 km. Who would be surprised by places 1.2.3. for Polish ladies?
2. Contest day: originally again the same 322 km as the day before, but this time achieved, even with 80 km/h speed by Pela Majewska. There were 3 outlandings BUT – which is more important – not less than 6 national records 1) Belgium – Geogeo Litt 2) Bulgaria – Liliana Andonowa 3) Czech Republic – Jindra Paluskova 4) Denmark – Signe Skafte Moeller 5) DDR – Monika Warstat 6) USA Henriette Freese. All happy record women were congratulated with cakes and fancy pastry.
3. Contest day: mammoth triangle of 544 km but...m..e..t..e..o..r o.l o..g y!!!. Announced heat of over 30° C The brave ladies in their Pirat struggled more than 8 hours. Pela Majewska and Eda Laan almost made it, achieving 461 km cross country. On that last leg of the 500 km triangle they had to stay overnight on the field. They were towed out next morning, back to Leszno. Remarkable day also for Monika Warstat celebrating quite a jubilee: this day marked her 1000. start and in the course of the flight she rounded her 1000. hour of flight.

4. Contest day: 204 km triangle – 19 of the 21 pilots landed back in Leszno. For the first time the winner was not Polish, victory went to blue eyed Regina Czeponene, “Master of Sports”, starting for USSR but not speaking a single word of Russian. She is Lithuanian. The same goes for Eda Laan from Estonia, thus two USSR participants needing a Russian interpreter!

5. Contest day: return flight 306 km. Quite decent development of cumulus but in spite of 2000 m base lift was irregular, sometimes 1m/s, sometimes more, sometimes left, sometimes right, sometimes just nowhere. Therefore no fantastic speed for athletic Hungarian winner Maria Bolla but the cherry on the cake: 1000 points. More than half of the group got many points, 11. place was still generously rewarded 961 points.

6. Contest day: 250 km triangle – the ladies were wondering: “ONLY?”. Again 19 pilots came back to land in Leszno – and “Bomber” Maria Bolla was in the vein again, preceding Sue Martin who now felt run in and pleased with her Pirat.

7. Contest day: “only” 2 x 104 km triangle. A low over the Balkans, possibly overdevelopment. Competition management had become cautious, TOO cautious maybe because the weather turned out to be fantastic. What a pity, these distance legs were really too short. Anyway, because of the 1200 m height limitation one could not really make the best of the high cloud base. This double sprint around the airfield was won by Irmgard Morgner, she landed a few minutes after 2 p.m.... and went swimming. With mixed feelings pilots looked at the cumuli...at 7 p.m!
Suspense, suspense. Pela Majewska firmly kept her lead but the group of the first ten pilots ranked within 250 points, quite a list of serious medal candidates, among which Sue Martin (not just by accident 2 world records on her name!). From day to day Sue got more familiarized with the qualities of the Pirat... and with European weather conditions.

8. Contest day: return flight 187 km, one leg of the 322 km of the first contest day. Today serious risk of thunderstorms on the track, probably triggered off by 26 °C.
Exactly at 13.45 hour the first thunderstorm appeared above Leszno. Three pilots had already gone: experienced Pela Majewska, Sue Martin and neophyte Geogeo Litt.. It WAS the right decision: contest number 8, perfect for the victory of the 8th contest day for the sympathetic Australian in her Pirat Nr 8. But conditions were far from easy and many finishers put their glider down in streaming rain, even hail, didn't you Irmgard Morgner and Monika Warstat? A real witches' cauldron on this 5th of July!
Next day Leszno was surprised by high layers of fog, slowly rising but at

noon the base was still not higher than 750 m. Nobody regretted the neutralization of the day. After all, pilots had been flying on 6 consecutive days!

9. Contest day: mini-task: return flight 150 km. Low cloud base but strong thermals which allowed good speeds on this last contest day, two thirds of the competitors reached speeds over 80 km/h. On Pirat gliders, best glide 1/31 if you please!

On this last day big applause welcomed Danish Signe Skafte Moeller, the oldest competitor – 55: she closed her Leszno adventure with landing back in Leszno: for the very first time she could avoid landing out!

One pilot was less lucky, Eda Laan of Estland. She was very disappointed, quite unexpectedly losing the bronze medal she was so much counting on and almost had in her pocket. At the start of the day Jindra Paluskova was 4th in overall ranking. To chase Eda from medal position she would have to score 75 points more than Eda.. Incredible but true: with 88,6 km/h Jindra obtained ONE extra point, 76 and was allowed to climb on the rostrum next to Pela Majewska und Sue Martin.



On ground director Josef Dankowski. First row extreme right Adele Orsi (ITA) first and only appearance.

The last contest day ended with a traditional evening party, nice but quite unlike the evening of the first contest day, when at 8 p.m competitors were invited near and around the bonfire by the chief-witch. Clearly, this evening was the exclusive concern of the witches for the inauguration ritual of the **Babajagas**. Since a few years Polish women glider pilots had chosen their symbol: a witch crossing the sky on her flying broomstick. Now with international attendants

the ceremony became an international matter. The witches circle presided over by dynamic chief witch Pelagia Majewska (40) deliberated on the admission of the new candidates in the sisterhood. To start with every novice has to honestly answer sports – and/or private questions –, which leads to linguistic Babylon situations, quite an interpreter job! Then comes the main part of the ceremony, the underlying idea being the solemn promise to act with fair play in all circumstances. Every novice has to repeat after the animating chief witch and in HER language too, therefore in Polish, the oath “*Przyrzekam byc dobra czarownica, bo kocham latanie* and then a last effort *przestrzen*. So. A real tongue twister! But only after having danced a tour of honour on the witches broomstick around the blazing fire and sealing the oath with a lip print in the witch chronicle, the initiation ceremony is accomplished, the novice is now member of the witches squadron... Unforgettable ritual!



Left: Maria Bolla (HUNG);
right: Pelagia Majewska (POL)

Unforgettable as was the whole Leszno 1973 happening

Success: first contact with the Pirat, at least for the pilots of the „capitalistic“ countries. They appreciated its flexibility and to their agreeable surprise navigation in Poland did not cause the expected problems.

Success with 13 national gliding records, all the more valuable because this time NOT flown on high class competition gliders.

Success: experience acquired by pilots with unequal experience levels, which however did not seem to be an obstacle for the large majority to obtain quite respectable scores.

Success to meet and get acquainted with good pilots from eleven other countries, turning this group of until then unknown pilots into an informal gathering of friends.

Success of course for outstanding winner Pelagia Majewska. At the prize giving ceremony a military band played the Dombrowski Mazurka, national anthem “Poland is not lost yet”

Certainly not in gliding!

Success also for the organization. Leszno is and remains candidate for next time: Next time world championships? Will the FAI-CIVV gentlemen continue to



turn down such proposal? Don't they fear an assault by the witches squadron?
No they don't...
Patience, girls, patience!

I have been asked to *summarize* the international FAI approved women's gliding competitions. "Summarize?"... I shall try to restrain from too many details for the contests

after 1973, the intention never was to write a whole book.

But Leszno1973 was such an overwhelming gliding adventure I was fortunate enough to attend, these impressions just slipped out. Excuse me for being so elaborate...



From left to right: Sue Martin (AUS) 2nd Pelagia Majewska (POL) 1st Jindra Paluskova (CZ) 3rd

1st international women's gliding competition FAI approved

LESZNO (Poland) 1 9 7 3

ALL 21 pilots from 12 countries
on glider PIRAT

Final results after 9 tasks (return 187 km, triangle 544, 544, 206, 306, 250,
2 x 104, return 187, return 150)

ALL tasks were 1000 points days

1. Majewska Pela	POL	8580 pts	victory 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd tasks
2. Martin Sue	AUS	8261	victory 8 th task
3. Paluskova Jindra	CSRS	8030	
4. Lann Eda	USSR	8037	co-victory 3 rd task
5. Badura Hanna	POL	8028	victory 9th task
6. Morgner Irmgard	DDR	7984	victory 7 th task
7. Warstat Monika	DDR	7961	
8. Balvanosi Magda	HUN	7887	
9. Bolla Maria	HUN	7866	victory 5 th and 6 th tasks
10. Dankowska Ada	POL	7821	
11. Litt Geogeo	BEL	7578	
12. Czeponene Regina (Lith)	USSR	7317	victory 4th task
13. Freese Henriette	USA	7187	
14. Kostka Irena	POL	6937	
15. Orsi Adele	ITA	6933	
16. Andonova Liliana	BULG	6911	
17. Türke Bärbel	GER	6891	
18. Deutschmann Marianne	GER	6673	
19. Stawrowska Teodorka	BULG	5362	
20. Floden Gun-Britt	USA	4296	
21. Moeller Signe Skafte	DK	2692	

NO COST for use of Pirat, aerotow
and retrieving after outlanding