

## **The 2005 World Class Nationals – a pilot’s return to soaring and his first experience racing in a National contest**

Through some secret selection process, I was the one picked to tell the story of what happen during this event, my first National contest. I was a rookie pilot! My name was mentioned by others to write this article and then seconded, and within less than a minute, I was the official SSA article writer. Being better at math and not thinking of myself as being much of a writer, but always up for a challenge, here it is. You will have to let me know if you can relate to my vantage point on this race and how I got there. The SSA web site ([www.ssa.org/contestresults2.asp](http://www.ssa.org/contestresults2.asp)) has all the contest scores and the “Charlie Reports”, but here’s my angle on the race and why soaring has always been and will always be part of my life!

My first time at a major soaring contest was 35 years ago at Elmira, NY in 1970. This was a huge event for me. There were more glider pilots, sailplanes, and Piper Cubs than I had ever seen before. On top of all this we had a camper parked by all the other glider families. I even got to meet George Moffat who won his first world championship in Marfa, Texas this same year. I was 7 years old at the time of that contest. My dad, a world war two P-51 fighter pilot veteran and airline captain, would race his K-8. Ever since this experience, deep inside of me was the desire to be a contest pilot and fly in a National contest. I went on to solo at age fourteen, and would continue to glide only through my teen years.

My soaring experience is similar to others I’ve heard about. I was in to it early then stopped, only to return 20 years later. I started gliding again in September of 2001 at Bermuda High Soaring (BHS) in South Carolina just a few days before 9-11. Several months before this, I began to reevaluate how I was spending my time and what was really important to me. The 9-11 attack was a catalyst for many Americans to wakeup and celebrate life. It accelerated everything for me. I had been working intensely for 15 years trying to make my mark on the business world. I had become consumed in my work and was married with two children, which meant that the family needed even more of my time and energy. Up until that point in time, somewhere over that focused 15 year career I had forgotten about some of my earlier experiences, goals and the fun I had when I was younger. I felt the weight, but had no balance. It was time to start gliding again, having some fun and setting some new goals.

As one of the 60 club members flying BSH, I have experienced the many great things the sport has to offer all over again, especial good soaring people. I wanted to fly cross-country and compete. This was the place to do it. Frank and Jane Reid bought BHS when in was located in Chester, SC and relocated over a decade ago 40 miles east to the very small town of Flat Rock, sometimes called Jefferson, SC in Soaring magazine. There’s maybe 100 people living in Flat Rock. It’s only an hour’s drive south of Charlotte, NC and it’s located strategically away from Class B and C airspace in the Carolina’s. BSH may have the largest concentration of PW-5s in the North America with a current total of 11. This is largely due to years of promoting the World Class by Frank

and Jane. I didn't have to think long about buying a glider. Frank was planning an Eastern Regional World Class contest in May 2003 and had a vision of perhaps a National contest at BHS. His vision of these contests and the legacy of past newspaper articles hanging framed on the wall in the bunkhouse at BHS talking about past soaring contests at the old Bermuda High site with Karl Striedieck, Dick Schreder, Eric Mozer and others sold me. I wanted in on the action, so in March of 2003 with very little cross-country soaring experience, out came my check book to buy my PW-5.

Bermuda High with excellent contest and training facilities, an air conditioned club house, wireless internet access, RV hookups, camping sites, hot showers, and lots of golf carts for ground operations, is an ideal soaring facility. The small hangar houses seven PW-5 gliders and there are two larger hangars packed with sailplanes. There are about a half dozen instructors on staff, nearly a 4000 foot grass runway, three Pawnee tow planes and tow pilots always at the ready. With so many of the same type of "one class" ship located on one field, the PW-5 is great for our club. Information sharing on the BHS web site ([www.glider.org](http://www.glider.org)), cross country training, and mentoring are abundant for all levels of pilots. This helped me and it allowed me to help others as I became more experienced and appreciated what the PW-5 could do.

For this contest, Frank Reid was the Contest Manager and with the help of many BSH members planned and delivered an excellent event. The facilities were perfect and meals were catered in at the gliderport every other day. Rick Sheppe came from Vermont to score, Charley Spratt was the CD, Harry Senn was the Weatherman, and Red Smith handled retrieves. This was an awesome contest staff with a wealth of experience to share with an eager pilot. The environment and people at the contest were extremely friendly. Even with all the pilot's competitive juices flowing, everyone stuck together. The club members would handle almost every detail on the ground and they would be recognized for their efforts in each daily pilot's meeting. Special gifts were presented to them as well as the winning pilot for the day. Many pilots had only a part time crew or no crew at all when they arrived, but every pilot was covered with a volunteer from the ground crew. This was a very tight group of people who celebrate the sport and enjoy each others company. We all bought Charlie Spratt's new book "See you at the airport" and had him sign it. For all of us the nightly gathering point for food and drink would be under the big pine tree by the club house. One night, Ed Kilbourne even came to play songs from his CD Cloudbase.

The field of competitors came from all around the country. A few last minute cancellations would mean a total of 13 gliders on the grid for the contest. All the local pilots who would fly in the contest knew who was coming to this event and what they were capable of doing. We all knew that Francois Pin, Pat Tucking and Bill Snead were going to be here. They were the "Big 3". The guys who remain at the top of the World Class rankings and had been on the USA World Team together. Francois, Pat and Bill had flown together many times and had years of experience in the PW-5. They had each won at least one World Class National contest. They knew what to expect of each other in the air after the start gate opened. When they showed up on the field it was obvious

they were prepared, confident and relaxed. Francois and Pat even arrived early to host a cross country camp for club members 3 days before the contest started.

A new comer to the World Class, but a major competitive threat was Johnny Byrd. Johnny had won several National contests before in other sailplane classes. Last year at Bermuda High, he had first flown the PW-5 in a loaner glider with an electronics setup was unfamiliar to him. He told me at that time that he typically likes to have 100 hours in a glider before he feels comfortable. He would have perhaps 4-5 hours of PW-5 flight time before the first contest day and would then go on to win the 2004 East Region World Class contest beating Francois Pin who placed second. Leading up to this years National contest Johnny had sold his Discus that he owned for years, and bought his own PW-5 and refurbished it. When he arrived from Texas this year, he still had more work to do.

Other competitors from out of town included Val Paget from Texas, Marin Wajda from Illinois and Bill Thar from Blirstown, NJ. All had also been flying the PW-5 for a while and all had flown in the Nationals before. Local pilots from the Carolina's made up the rest of the field. Richard Maleady who spends most of his time competing in a DG-808 decided to give the World Class a try. Frank Reid who would have to balance managing the contest and flying in the contest. Jay Campbell a recent convert to the PW-5 after 13 years of soaring and regional competition. Jane Reid, well known within the competitive soaring ranks for years and who prefers to fly the PW-5 over other sailplanes, would be the second woman in the field. Wes Chumley, a long time PW driver and regional competitor who is known around our club as our technical expert.

And then there was me, Scott Neumann, with a Silver badge, two recent regional contest experiences, an RV camper with soaring posters hanging on it made by my kids, 10 days provisions, and the mini-van hooked to the sailplane trailer. For support, my wife and two kids would try to make it to the gliderport as often as possible during the contest. Additionally, I was armed with my laptop, Blipmaps and SeeYou software. I had spent several weeks getting prepared for this contest, which included a few weeks working on the sailplane in the garage at home. I tried to fly on every good gliding day I could make it to the gliderport. This amounted to about 28 hours flying since the beginning of the year and a total of 83 hours in my PW-5 since purchased. Not quite the 100 hours Johnny had talked about to "get comfortable" to compete, but the stage was set for my first Nationals and 10 consecutive days of sailplane racing for the first time in my life.

The weather on the first two practice days was a challenge. Practice Day 1 allowed me to compare my performance to Pat Tuckey's and it became obvious to me despite my preparations before the contest started, I was not flying aggressive enough. I knew there was more I could learn from Pat. On Practice Day 2, I was very fast on the first leg working the clouds and then took on a blue hole over Lancaster with no fear, flying much more aggressively. I flew lower and lower, caught up with Pat and followed him depressingly right into Lancaster airport. This was not the plan! We had a nice chat on the ground about what we should have done. As the conditions improved and we watched several other gliders fly overhead on their way to the next turnpoint (TP).

On the first contest day I was determined to get a good start. The field launched quickly using the 3 Pawnees and the weather was looking pretty good. It was not as strong as yesterday's practice so I patiently worked on setting up a good start. Most everyone started before me. When I did finally get a good start, the flight to the first TP at Camden went well. But as I got further south, the sky darkened and became totally overcast and dark like a stormy sky from a Harry Potter movie. What a difference 20 miles made. The earlier starters were smart to get going. On the flight back into the wind, the lift was shutting down and the trees, lots of them, were getting closer. I finally connected low over a large feed farm in a thermal marked up higher by Jay Campbell and some birds. Jay and I were both glad to get out of there and we finally made it back to BHS with several others who did not complete the task. Only the "Big 3" and Richard Maleady made it around that day and Bill Thar would have, but landed only 2 miles short of BHS on a long final glide from the northeast where the lift was still working. I was amazed. Many of the local pilots were left wondering what happened. That day the dark forested area south towards Camden became known as the "Camden forest of doom".

On the next day we had very good conditions and the assigned task called put us over BHS several times as we went twice around the course. Still a little shocked from Day 1, I flew conservative with the goal of wanting to just get around. There were gliders everywhere on course and at one time or another I got to fly with most everyone. It resulted in a 5<sup>th</sup> place finish for the day for me behind Francois, Bill, Pat and Johnny. I was feeling pretty good! I finished just after all those big names in soaring and ahead of all the local pilots. What if I really knew what I was doing? Two things I felt I knew for sure, I flew best in better conditions and my 9 year old son loved it when I made a high speed pass to finish over the airport. That was how this day ended.

A Turn Area Task (TAT) was called on the next day and I felt ready for it. I had started to pick up advice from Johnny and Francois about reading the sky and flying smooth with minimum control inputs and I could understand the logic behind the day's task called by Charlie. Out on course I was all alone most of the flight and managed to stay with the stronger but not always predictable lift. This was one of the days to stay away from the lake at Hartsville and the sink hole that seem to consistently form there throughout this contest. By the last day this area would become known by all as the "Hartsville hole". On final glide back to BHS I flew from good weather into a large isolated shower that had just past over the gliderport. This was heavy blinding rain on the canopy of the glider that blocked most of the horizon. I could see straight down for a clearer reference and after 3 miles it cleared up revealing BHS. That experience was quite exciting and I had the altitude to compensate for the rain, but Marion Wajda was not so lucky. He landed off-field hard in the rain and cracked his tail boom. This flight taught me even more about the weather, and revealed several mistakes that I made in flying the TAT, but it was a good day for me.

The conditions continued to change radically throughout this contest and so did my daily finishes. On Day 4 Bill Thar had a surprise second place finish, and I had settled into a solid 7<sup>th</sup> position in the cumulative points. Then Day 5 came when I got skunked! Very

confident leading up to grid time I had pulled from the Grid with a Nav problem, then I used up my last two relights with poor strategy and even worst luck trying to get away from the airport. My day was cut short and zero points posted for me for the day. I was not the only one that got the short end of the stick on this day, but several pilots made it far enough around to make it a day. It was a close one. Richard came in second by only one point. Jane Reid placed forth and was so pumped up after her flight and the effort required just getting to Cheraw airport, she remained excited for hours after the flight. An otherwise very mellow person, her adrenalin was pumping! She had flown hard just to stay in the air and get as far as the leaders who were also challenged on this day. I on the other hand, was at an all time low in my soaring career. Just lower than the time, at age 15, I landed a 2-33 off-field on the Pennsylvania side of the ridge from Blairstown, NJ. There was no damage, but the 2-33 is not a retrieve friendly aircraft and my father was not real happy. This, just like Day 5, was a very long day for me.

The challenging weather and difficult times did not stop there. On Day 6 only six gliders got scores. A few ships got away and made minimum distance. Wes Chumley was one of them, and won the day which was huge for Wes. He had clawed his way from the back in the pack and was consistently moving ahead. Back at the gliderport the weather went from questionable to just plain bad. The six other gliders that had not left the field yet and were sitting on goose eggs for the day. We all seem to have run out of time and opportunities. All but one glider remained on the grid at 5:00pm, Pat Tuckey. He was sitting first in the cumulative scoring but by less than 200 points. Francois, Bill and Johnny had all picked up points for the day, landed out and called in for a retrieve. It would be a contest day and the only ticket for Pat to ride would be one of the small isolated thunderstorms that had been moving over BHS and in the direction of the first turn point. At 5:30 he launched just as a storm began to move over. At 5:38 he started. Amazingly, he made it to the first turn point and then some, which landed him in 4<sup>th</sup> for the day. For those who witnessed it this was one of the most exciting events in this contest. I had never seen a glider launch that late in the day at BHS before.

At this soaring contest you could walk down the grid and ask what each pilot's advice for the day is and you will get a lot of different answers. I was lucky to have Francois grid behind me each day. He is a very easy guy to talk to. We would talk briefly before the launch and he would provide me with some coaching. We would talk about reading the clouds, cloud shadows on the ground, the turnpoints, the wind, the start, and so on. However the most important advice he gave me was relax, have fun and believe in what you're doing. I had a lot of value for his advice and ironically my 12 year old daughter had made me a little 3" square sticky note that said "Have Fun". I taped it onto my instrument panel in the middle of the contest and now keep it on my desk in my office. When this advice started to sink in, my contest results improved again. I had made a critical mistake during the first half of the contest when I would work early every morning and again late at night on business. I had to focus on only racing. Experience and consistency was keeping the top scorers on top. It was the "Big 3" and Johnny in 4<sup>th</sup> overall only 821 points behind the number one spot. The leader had changed for the fourth time in six days of flying with Francois now leading. The weird weather had everyone

flying hard and we were getting use to heading out on a 100 mile task, when we were lucky to get higher than 4000' AGL.

With just two contest days remaining, I was a little more experienced and like the weather I was very inconsistent. However, I was feeling good and hoping to make up for some lost ground. But when I blew the start on the second to last day and was left scratching around back at BHS alone looking for any reasonable lift at all, my plan changed back to "just get around". So after a relight, I put my dad's old gliding hat on for the first time looking for some luck, climbed to cloud base at 3400' and headed out almost two hours behind the leaders. This was going to be iffy right from the start and I had at least 58 miles to go. Two gliders had already landed out at the first TP only 13 miles away. The sun was ducking behind broken clouds and lift was so weak that I think I was leaning forward in my seat on the first leg so as to lighten the glider and fly farther. I put what was later pointed out to me by the scorer as one data point inside the first TP before I headed out quickly for the second, which was back over the "Camden forest of doom". As I flew farther and lower, it got darker. Not a good combination. I picked out a group of freshly plowed fields ahead and arrived circling in a sustaining thermal at only 500 AGL. I circled several times able to maintain this altitude waiting for a small circle of sun to move with the clouds and hit these fields. Soon after it did, I caught the best thermal of my life! I was in the middle of the birth of this thermal and with each 360 degree turn the vario averager increased more and more. When it hit 9+ kts and I was over 5000' I was feeling something I had never felt flying a glider. I almost broke out in song! From here I was able to get the final TP, avoid the "Hartsville hole" and head for the finish at Bermuda High, but I would need one more thermal to make it. I wouldn't find it and the sun was gone under the clouds. I worked from field to field closer and closer to home, but 2.5 miles from BHS at 350' I pulled the spoilers and landed safely straight ahead on the 9<sup>th</sup> fairway of the local golf course. Tuckey, speeding home with more energy, heard me on the radio reporting my landing location and was able to "play through", finishing first for the day and back in the lead. Jay Campbell had a surprise 2<sup>nd</sup>. Like Jane just a few days earlier, I too remained pumped up for hours after this flight.

On the last day of the contest it looked like the boomer we had been waiting for the last nine days. The contest staff was reluctant to call the weather and task with any optimism, because of the past wacky conditions that had challenged us all contest, but the call ended up being right on. For the first time in this contest it would be a 1000 point day and the weather was exactly as predicted. The wind on the second leg would be a challenge and if any of the leaders made a mistake it would shuffle the top spots. Pat ended up beating Francois by 0.13 mph to take first place and the contest. Bill Snead was behind Francois by only 0.26 mph. On this day and during this contest the World Class and the one class racing concept provide an excellent event. Strange weather had challenged us during most of this race, but we ended it all with a great day. Only 392 points separated first and second place. It was the pilot not the machine that made the difference in the results everyday. Even with the "Big 3" and Johnny Byrd taking the top 4 spots overall, seven other pilots had a top 5 finish or better for at least one day of the contest.

The World Class Nationals will be in Marfa, Texas next year and there should be an even larger number of gliders competing, which means even more great people at the contest. The World Class is growing and both new and veteran pilots are joining to race. If you have never flown in a contest, get prepared and go do it. The World Class PW-5 is an economical way to start and stay racing ([www.wcsa.org](http://www.wcsa.org)). It's easy to handle in the air and on the ground. If you're a rookie, do your homework, know the rules, get a mentor and keep flying. Fly in different kinds of weather, not just the good stuff. Balance all the great technology and information available with experience in the cockpit! It's true, you will learn more in a contest than you ever learn before, especially at National event. My family is now interested in the sport and I value their support. Remember to relax, have fun and believe. After these 10 contest days, there were highs and there were lows, but I felt like a winner. The experience was fabulous and I'm ready to go and do again!

### **RESULTS - 2005 World Class Nationals, May 17-26:**

<b>Place</b>	<b>Pilot</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Home</b>
1	Pat Tuckey	4K	5100	TX
2	Francois Pin	FP	4708	TN
3	Bill Snead	6W	4218	TX
4	Johnny Byrd	30	3857	TX
5	Richard Maleady	1KG	3785	NC
6	Jay Campbell	56	3157	SC
7	Wes Chumley	LG	2937	SC
8	Bill Thar	G8	2787	NJ
9	Jayne Reid	JF	2778	SC
10	Scott Neumann	NEU	2693	NC
11	Frank Reid	86	2110	SC
12	Val Paget	1VG	1048	TX
13	Marin Wadja	MW	837	IL

### **About the author:**

Scott Neumann started flying gliders at ACA in Blairstown, NJ, and soloed at age 14 at the Wasserkuppe in Germany. He flies single engine Cessna 182RG and has 760 total hours with 150 hours in gliders. Scott is a Regional Manager for a firm that produces custom robotic and automation systems for manufactures. He is the son of Bob Neumann who was an active contest pilot in the northeast in the 1970s. Scott returned to soaring in 2001 after 20 years away from the sport and lives in Charlotte, NC with his wife Kerrie, and children Jenna (12) and Josh (10). He owns and races "NEU" his World Class PW-5.

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00 Scott Neumann, age 7, with George Moffat in 1970 at Harris Hill in Elmira, NY  
Photo courtesy of Neumann family archive



01 Teams traveled for up to 3 days to get to Bermuda High in SC and start flying.  
Photo by Kerrie Neumann



02 With the names of past winners, the World Class National trophy sits in the foreground, and Charlie conducts the daily pilot's meeting. Photo by Lou Frank.



03 Three Pawnees with pilots Mike, Keith & Thomas.  
Photo by Lou Frank



04 A classic combination in soaring for years, "Team Byrd" waiting on the grid.  
Photo by Lou Frank



Picture 16

05 Good looking Cu above, Scott Neumann on the Grid with Jenna's "Have Fun" reminder stuck to the panel. Photo by Lou Frank



06 Francois Pin finishes and waves to the camera.  
Photo by Kerrie Neumann



07 Johnny surprises Josh Neumann with his own set of wings and valuable instruction for the future.  
Photo by Kerrie Neumann



08 The day over, Jenna Neumann and Lou Frank wipe down the wings. Scott Neumann bows to the soaring gods.  
Photo by Josh Neumann



09 At the usual meeting spot under the big pine, Frank Reid addresses the group after dinner.  
Photo by Scott Neumann



10 Nightly celebration by some of the ground crew; Nancy Snead, Louis Diera, Mr. Thar & Wayne Rogers.  
Photo by Scott Neumann



11 Still flying under the moon, Jenna & Josh Neumann entertain the crowd after dinner.  
Photo by Scott Neumann