

The AeroKurier Online Contest Not Just for Computer Nerds

You've probably heard pilots talk about uploading flight claims to the OLC, but you've probably also heard some horror stories about how hard it is to use. The truth is that, while it may be intimidating the first time, it can be very simple, if you take things one step at a time. Don't be alarmed by the length of these instructions. I have simply tried to anticipate many of the common problems. Once you've mastered the basics, you too can be uploading flights and bragging about all the points that you've accumulated.

To play the game, you'll need a computer, download software for your GPS receiver, and a connection to the Internet. Although the OLC can be used without special upload software, your efforts will be much easier if you use a program such as SeeYou.

OLC Registration

Even if you plan on asking your computer nerd granddaughter to do all your uploading, the first step will be to register online as a contestant. Point your web browser to the OLC website, <http://www2.onlinecontest.org/olcphp/olc-i.php?olc=olc-i>. The initial page will offer an impressive variety of options, but for now, we're only interested in "Contest Registration" which is indicated by a "1" in Figure 1. Of course, the details of the various webpages will probably change over the years, but hopefully, the major options will remain the same. If you click on the registration link, a new page will be displayed in which you can elect to "add new competitor."

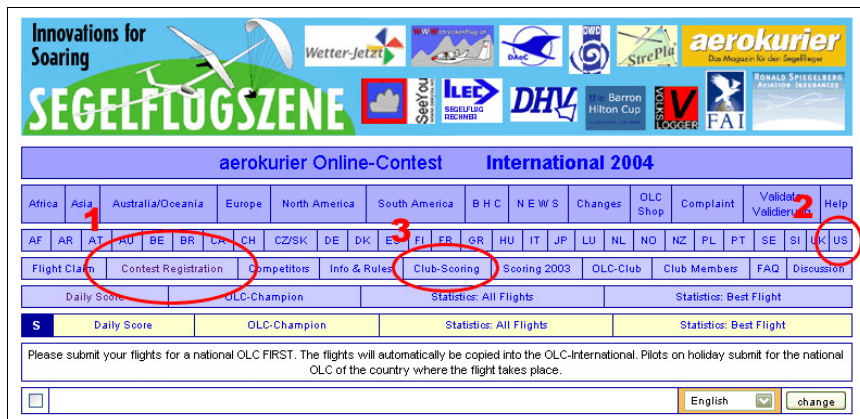


Figure 1 Options available on the home page of the OLC. 1 denotes the link for pilot registration, 2 denotes the link to the US competition, and 3 denotes the link to a ranking of clubs participating in the contest.

form (Fig. 2). You might think that filling out this form would be an easy exercise, but a few moments of thought at this stage will avoid many headaches later. Like most computers, the OLC server is too dumb to realize that "Bill" is a nickname for "William," and it will be even more mystified by "Clayton." Accordingly, you will want to fill in your name exactly as it will appear on all your flight documentation. The software is not expecting a middle name or initial, but if you want to include it, you should place it together with your first name. Another "gotcha" is your birthday, which should be input in European format, dd.mm.yy. You will need to decide on a password, and like always, things may get very tough if you forget it. At the beginning of each year, the OLC requires you to confirm your registration, and this password will be essential for that process. The remainder of the form is relatively straightforward. You should designate "126 Association (US-1668)" as the "scoring club" so that your flights will be credited to the Association.

The image shows a screenshot of the aerokunier website registration form. The page title is "aerokunier Online Contest International 2004". The form is titled "entry for oic-i". There are two callouts pointing to specific fields:

- Callout 1:** Points to the "Personal data" section. The fields shown are:
 - First/Given name *: Anita
 - Surname *: Metal-Sailplane
 - Date of birth *: 07.12.41 (dd.mm.yy)
 - nationality *: US (USA)
 - Street with number: 126 Schweizer Dr
 - Zip code: 24126
- Callout 2:** Points to the "Scoring club" section. The fields shown are:
 - language: English
 - scoring club *: 126 Association (US - 1668)

The form also includes sections for "select yourself", "OLC settings", "OLC categories", "Entry for National Contests", "Deutscher/Germany", "Österreich/Austria", "Schweiz/Switzerland", "Kanada/Canada", and "Public relations". At the bottom, there is a "Check entry" button.

Figure 2 Sample OLC registration. Notice that the birthday is in European format and that “126 Association” is selected as the scoring club.

The remainder of the form is not relevant, since it deals with various aviation organizations in Europe, and you can safely ignore it. It won't hurt to print off a copy of the form at this point for later reference. Once you're satisfied with the entries, click on “Check Entry” at the bottom of the page. If the program sees anything it wasn't expecting, you will probably get an error notice at this point, but most of the time, you should receive a confirmation that your registration is complete.

Other Useful Options on the Home Page

While we're looking at the OLC home page, it is useful to note two other options that will be important to you. As depicted by the numeral "2" in Figure 1, clicking on "US" will take you to those aspects of the competition relevant only to US pilots. Although pilots from all over the world submit flights to the OLC, for the purposes of the 1-26 Association, we need only be interested in the United States, and anytime you are using the OLC, you should select this option. Clicking on "Club-Scoring," (numeral "3" in Fig. 1) takes you to a list of aviation clubs and organizations that are competing. Clicking on "US" and then "Club-Scoring," in that order, will give you a list of the American clubs. As I write this, the 1-26 Association is third in overall US scoring.

Preparing the Flight Recorder

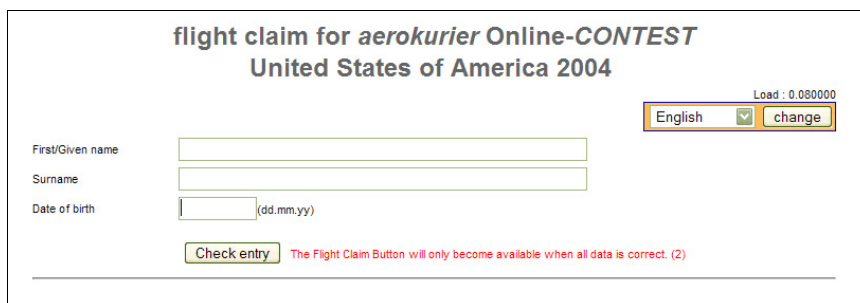
The next step is to configure your flight recorder so that the IGC files that it produces contain the same information as the OLC registration. This is probably not strictly necessary with every type of recorder, but it can sure make things easier. Unfortunately, the procedure for doing this will be different for each manufacturer. If you use an IGC-approved secure flight recorder, you should use the procedures or software appropriate for your receiver. If you plan to use a GARMIN handheld receiver as your flight recorder, you can achieve the same result with software such as G7toWin or SeeYou.

Downloading the Flight from Your Recorder

Actually getting your computer to talk to your flight recorder can be a straightforward exercise or a black art. Nearly every recorder comes with proprietary software that can be used to obtain the flight. You can also use more generic programs such as SeeYou. Nevertheless, the things that can go wrong are too long to list and include mechanical problems with the computer, bad cables, and poorly configured software. Potential solutions to a misbehaving download are beyond the scope of this tutorial and may require yet another visit to your computer nerd granddaughter. Fortunately, downloads are becoming easier and more dependable as the flight recorder and computer industries work towards common ground. Regardless of how it is achieved, the goal of any download is the IGC file, which contains the details of your flight.

Manual Submission of Flights

If you are comfortable with downloading IGC files from your flight recorder, it is straightforward to upload them directly to the OLC without the necessity of additional software. Remember



The screenshot shows a web form titled "flight claim for aerokurier Online-CONTEST United States of America 2004". The form includes input fields for "First/Given name", "Surname", and "Date of birth" (with a "(dd.mm.yy)" label). There is a "Load : 0.080000" indicator and a language dropdown menu set to "English" with a "change" button. A "Check entry" button is visible at the bottom, with a red error message below it: "The Flight Claim Button will only become available when all data is correct. (2)".

Figure 3 Form required for manual submission of a flight claim.

that the deadline for submitting a flight is always Tuesday at midnight, local time. Just to the left of the "Contest Registration" option on the OLC home page (Fig. 1), you will see an option, "Flight Claim." Clicking on this will generate a new form in which

you enter your name and birthday (Fig. 3). Not surprisingly, these have to match exactly the information that you entered when registering. A second form will appear in which you can provide the particulars of your flight. Most importantly, it is here that you provide the name of the relevant IGC file. Eventually, you will be prompted to upload the file. If everything works, your flight will be evaluated and scored automatically.

Input of Pilot Information into SeeYou

The flight analysis software, SeeYou, provides a far easier means of submitting your flight claims. A trial version can be obtained online at <http://www.seeyou.ws/>. The program will run for 14 days, more than enough time for you to give it a try. SeeYou offers the bonus that it also includes provision for downloading flights from most of the popular recorders, including GARMIN.

If you are using SeeYou, the first step will be to input the same information that you used when registering with the OLC into its “Pilots” database. From the program, select “Tools” on the menu bar, and choose

“Pilots.” Unless you’ve done this before, a screen containing an empty list of pilots will be displayed. Click on the “Add” button, and a window will open, the “Pilot Editor” (Fig. 4). It is here that you will want to enter the same information that you used when registering for the OLC. Of course, there are a couple of opportunities to make a mistake. Notice that SeeYou expects to see your birthday in the US format (i.e., mm/dd/yyyy). You will also have the chance to include information that was not needed when you registered, but is instead specific to the glider which

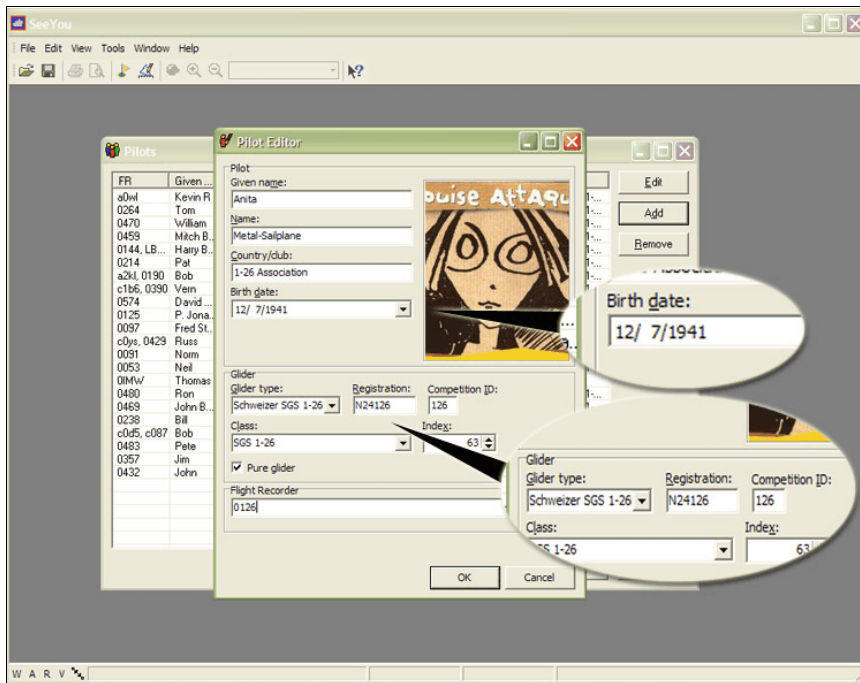


Figure 4 The “Pilot Editor” screen in SeeYou. This is where you can store the information that you used when you registered for the OLC.

you fly most often. In the example, “Schweizer SGS 1-26D 1-26E” has been selected from a drop-down menu. The program should provide automatically the appropriate handicap, which is indicated as the “index.” Be sure that “Pure glider” is selected. If this is left unchecked by accident, the OLC will assume that you are flying a motorglider, and it may reject your flight because your flight record will not contain a record of engine noise. If you have a flight recorder that you use frequently, the four digits of its serial number can be included at the bottom. For a GARMIN, the convention is to use a “zero,” followed by your three digit contest number. If you are really feeling ambitious, you can also include a photograph of yourself, but it is not necessary. When you are done, select “OK.”

Downloading Flights Using SeeYou

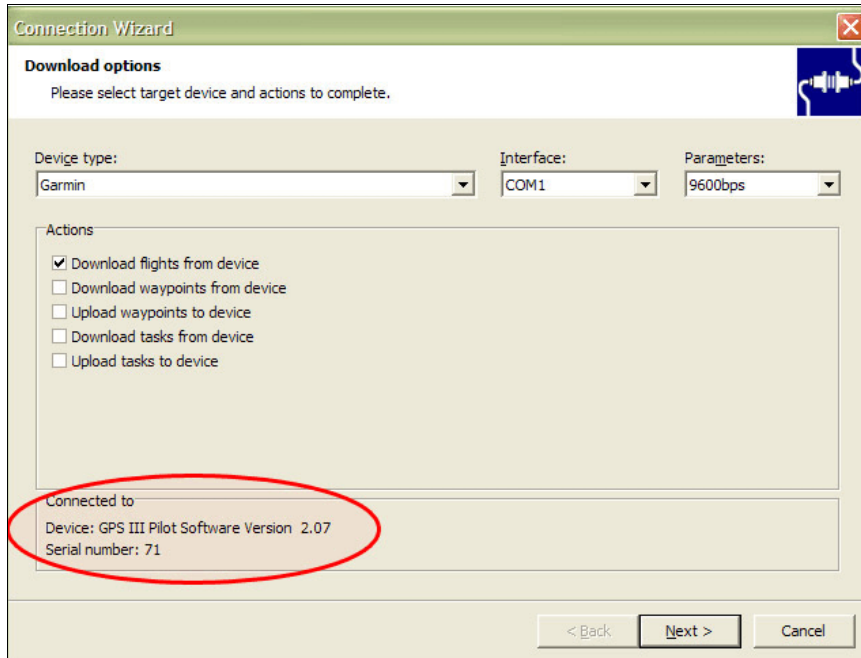


Figure 5 The “Connection Wizard” of SeeYou can be used to download directly from the flight recorder. Note that the computer has detected my GARMIN receiver.

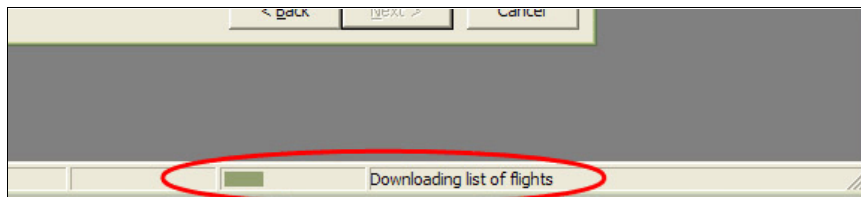


Figure 6 SeeYou indicates the progress of your download.

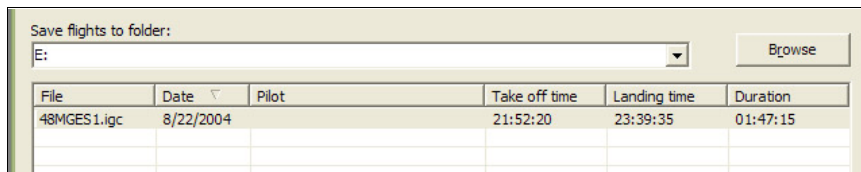


Figure 7 Confirmation that a flight has been detected by SeeYou. With GARMIN receivers, the flight has been downloaded to the computer and is waiting for pilot information to be input.

flight is correct. Click “Next” to move on to the next screen (Fig. 8), where you will input the necessary pilot information. If you click on the “people” icon, you will have the opportunity to select the pilot information that you entered earlier. This should complete the form, but check to ensure that all the entries are correct. Click “Next,” wait for the new window, and then click “Finish” to complete the download process. The flight should appear in the SeeYou program in all its glory.

To download a flight from your recorder using SeeYou, you will want to click on “File” in the top menu and then select “Connection Wizard.” If all the cables and computer ports are working and the phase of the moon is correct, you should see a new window that, among other things, reports a successful detection of the flight recorder (Fig. 5). Click on “Next” to begin the download. For a GARMIN, this can require several minutes, so don’t be alarmed if nothing appears to be happening. You can derive some assurance from the progress bar at the bottom (Fig. 6), which should slowly grow from left to right. Once the download is complete, you should see a confirmation (Fig. 7). There are a couple of things to check at this point. First, note that a file name is assigned to the flight, and you will want to make a note of it, as well as the folder in which it will be saved. If you are using a GARMIN, you will have to change the filename in a few moments. You should confirm that the date of the

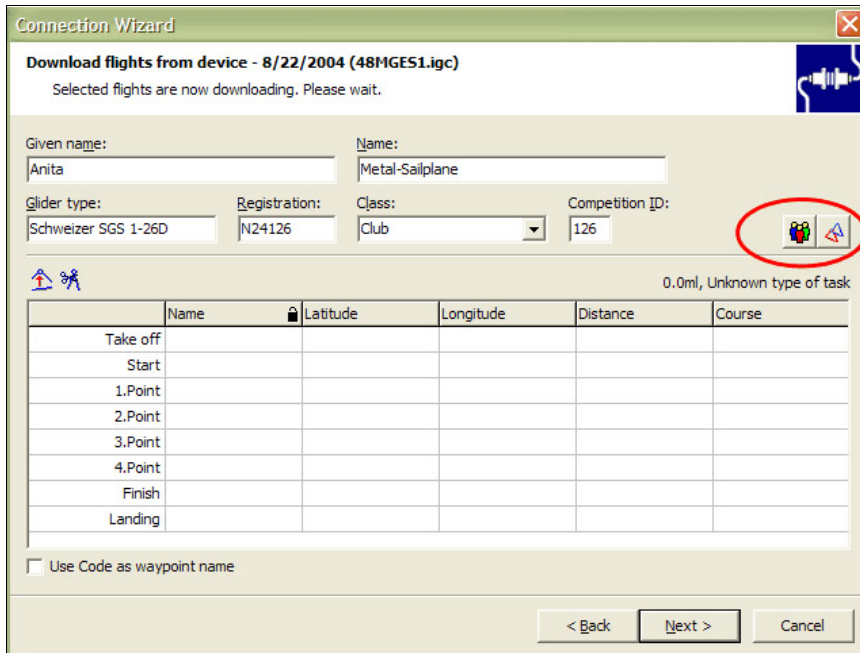


Figure 8 Input of pilot information into a downloaded flight using SeeYou. The circled button allows you to select information from the “Pilots” database.

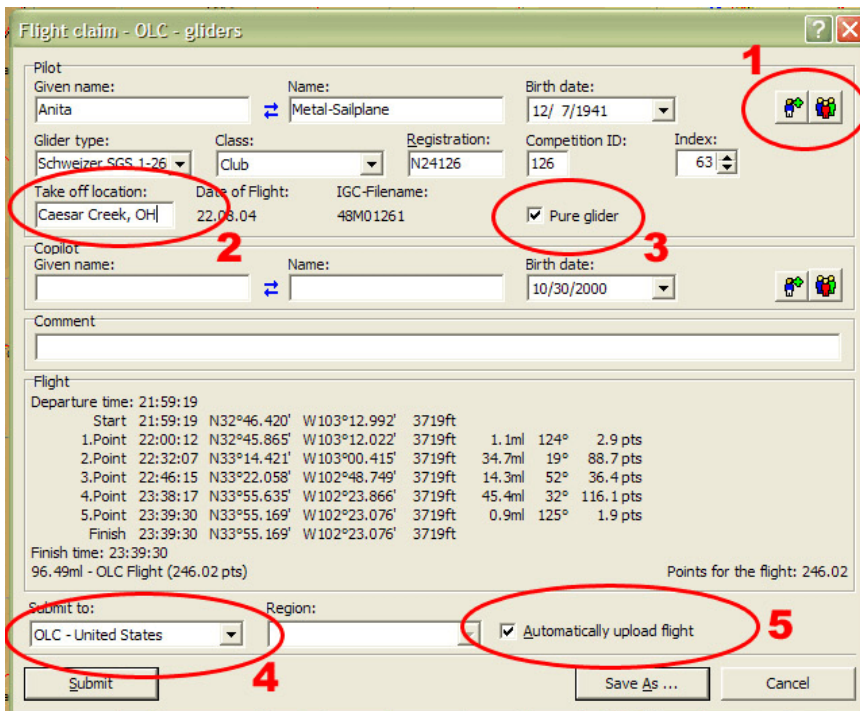


Figure 9 The OLC flight claim window of SeeYou. From here, all the information needed for submission is prepared and transmitted to the OLC.

Once the flight is in SeeYou, it is straightforward to submit it directly to the OLC. Of course, your computer must be connected to the Internet, so now would be the time to make the connection. Remember the Tuesday midnight deadline! From anywhere in the SeeYou flight analysis screen, right click, and then select “Flight Claim.” A

There is one final “gotcha” when dealing with GARMIN-generated files and SeeYou. The filename that you noted may not be in the proper IGC format, and you will need to change it. Close the flight in SeeYou and open the folder in which the flight was saved. You did remember to make a note of that, right? Rename the file according to the eight-character IGC format. In practice, this means that you will retain the first three letters (which encode the date of the flight). The fourth character should be changed to a zero, and the fifth through seventh should be your contest number. The final character should be the number of the flight. If this was the first flight of the day, it would be a “1.” For our example, we would change the name from “48MGES1.igc” to “48M01261.igc.” This seems like such a meaningless issue, but it is essential if the OLC server is to score your flight. Once the name has been changed, you can reopen it in SeeYou. You’re nearly done!

Flight Submission Using SeeYou

Once the flight is in SeeYou, it is straightforward to submit it directly to the OLC.

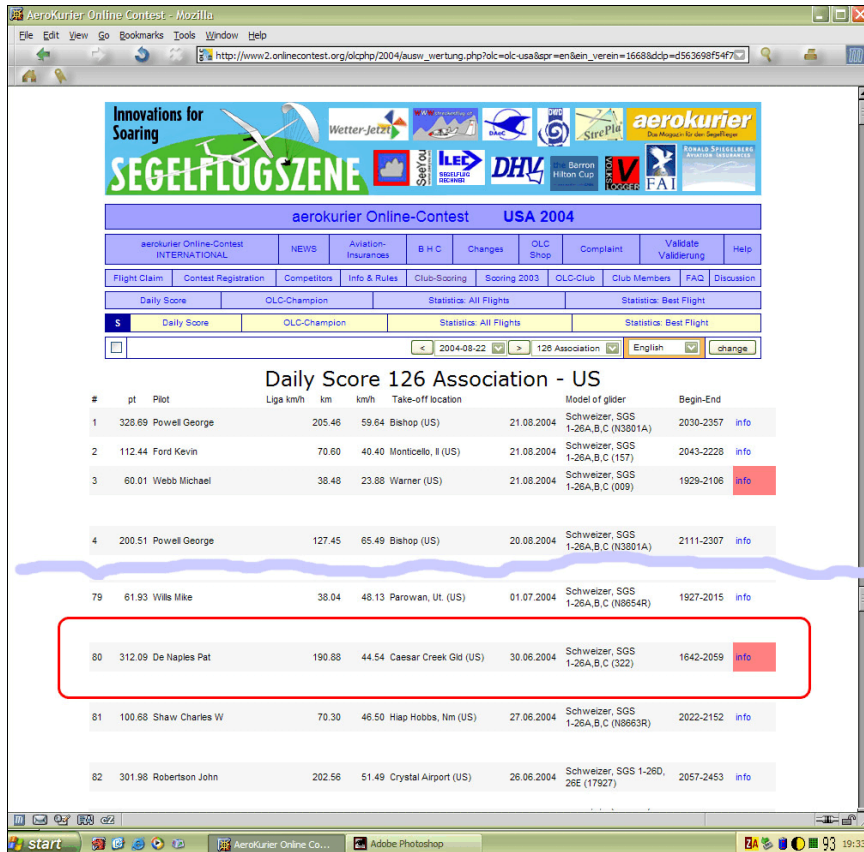


Figure 10 List of scores for the 1-26 Association, as listed on the OLC server. Notice that Pat De Naples flight received 312.09 points for a distance of 190.88 km. This score has been corrected for the appropriate handicap. Because a nonsecure flight recorder was used, the “info” link on the right is red.

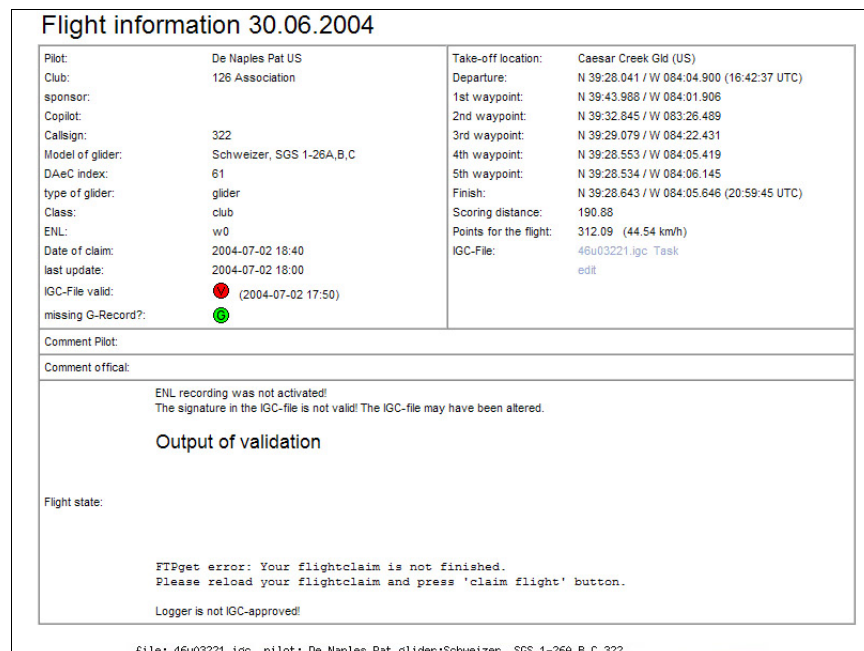


Figure 11 Indication that a nonsecure flight recorder was used to produce a submitted IGC file. Note that this does not necessarily mean that the flight was not scored.

new window will open that contains the turnpoints chosen by the program to maximize the distance covered by your flight (Fig. 9). The appropriate pilot information can be inserted automatically by clicking on the “people” icon (numeral “1” in the figure). In the window that will open, select the pilot information that you entered earlier. This will complete most of the form for you. However, there are a few details that remain to be done. You must enter manually the “Take off location” of the flight (numeral “2”). Be sure that “Pure glider” is checked (numeral “3”). From the drop down menu, ensure that “OLC - United States” is selected (numeral “4”) and that “Automatically upload flight” (numeral “5”) is checked. When everything is completed correctly, click on “Submit.” The program will connect to the OLC and transmit all the relevant information. A window confirming a successful submission should appear (or occasionally, an indication that something has gone wrong.)

Confirmation of the Flight with the OLC

Of course, you will want to see the results of all this effort. Point your browser to the OLC home

page, click “US,” “Club-scoring,” and “126 Association.” This should generate a list of submitted flights (Fig. 10), and yours should be near the top, since the flight was made recently. The number of points awarded to the flight should be displayed, as well as the distance in kilometers. On the right of each listing is an “info” option that provides additional information on the flight. Notice that in the example, this option is bright red. This usually means that the flight was recorded with a nonsecure GPS receiver. In this example, Pat De Naples used a GARMIN. Nonsecure flight recorders can be a source of needless anxiety, however, because sometimes you might mistakenly believe that the flight was not scored. If you select “info,” you may see a scary validation message (Fig. 11). Even worse, you may get the false impression that your flight claim is not finished. So long as you see points awarded on the 1-26 Association page, rest assured that the flight was scored. Similarly, if you look at your results while in the International part of the OLC, rather than specifying the US Competition, the flight will not appear to be scored. More accurately, a nonsecure recorder cannot be used for credit in the International competition. As before, however, the flight remains valid for the American contest.

Deadlines for Flight Submission

As emphasized above, it is important to remember the OLC deadline when submitting flights. Most of us will be flying on the weekends, but the deadline is each Tuesday evening at midnight, local time. My recommendation is to adopt the practice of submitting your weekend flights on Sunday night. A limitation of the OLC system at this time is the near-complete absence of support if anything goes wrong. An advantage of the Sunday submission is that it gives you two days to resolve any problems. I’ve helped at least one pilot figure out why his flight wasn’t being scored properly, but this is not the kind of work I would want to be doing in a rush. If we eventually adopt an online system such as this for more generalized 1-26 scoring, we will need to appoint a couple of software gurus who will make themselves available for consultation.

Thomas A. Pressley
Version 2, October 11, 2004

Special thanks to B. Resor, who prepared a similar description for the Albuquerque Soaring Club, and the 1-26 pilots who offered suggestions for improvement of the original draft.

SeeYou software is available at <http://www.seeyou.ws/>.
G7toWin is available at <http://www.gpsinformation.org/ronh/>.