

## Street Racing: A story of how the OLC injected new life into soaring at Moriarty

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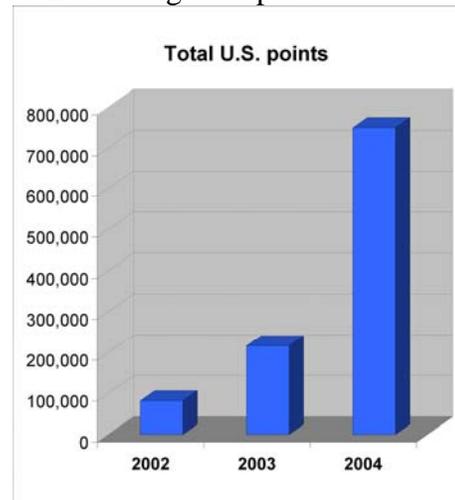
Glider pilots everywhere have been seeking out an easy way to make soaring fun for the pilot who has advanced beyond solo and private license stages. The brilliant pilots and programmers of the German *Aerokurier* magazine have created a solution in the Online Contest (known commonly as the OLC). At Moriarty in 2004, the OLC inspired a much-needed, fresh new environment filled with support, teamwork, and friendly competition among our pilots of all skill levels.

Check out the OLC webpage to get a detailed look at what it's all about, but the basics are as follows: put a GPS data logger in your glider, fly as far as you can, then upload the IGC format flightlog to the OLC server. It's really very simple.

Scoring is done automatically in a manner that optimizes your points, with a point being one handicapped kilometer. The task scheme is basically simple: the first four legs are scored at 100% full handicapped distance, the fifth leg at 80%, and the sixth leg at 60% of the handicapped distance. Notice that nothing about declared or designated turnpoints, start gates, or FAI sectors is mentioned. Again, simplicity is the name of the game here. This contest is not based directly on speed around a course, but long flights will necessarily require one to fly as fast as possible and to use their judgment of the weather in

order to decide where to position themselves during any given part of the day.

Usage of this online contest by U.S. pilots has been growing fast in the last few years. At first, a few computer-savvy pilots around the U.S. were using the OLC to share their flights, but usage was relatively infrequent. This year clubs all over the country are starting to take part in the fun and promoting use of the OLC among their pilots.



The OLC was originally promoted within the Albuquerque Soaring Club as a very simple way to manage our annual cross country contest and have an easy way to award trophies at the winter banquet. It evolved into much more than that.

After a few weeks of posting spring flights, other pilots at Moriarty also took interest in the OLC. The forces of the

Albuquerque Soaring Club and Sundance Aviation were joined into one OLC “club” called Albuquerque Soaring. None of us realized just how well our team (which consisted of 24 pilots) would come together to provide mentoring and challenges for each other during the next few months. In the process, we would eventually rack up almost one hundred thousand miles in the air together.

### **OLC as a learning tool**

The files on the OLC server are an enormous resource for fledgling pilots who are trying to understand how cross country flight is done. When flight logs are submitted to the OLC server, the files are available for download and analysis by anyone with internet access and the proper software (SeeYou, Strepla, etc.). If other pilots flew in the same area as you did, then compare their flights to yours to learn what everyone did wrong and right. Find out who nearly landed out or find out what it was like in a different part of the task area where you did not venture.

The OLC is also a learning tool even when you cannot be in the air. My favorite is to take a look at the sounding in the morning and then check the visible satellite loop during the afternoon at work and try to guess where all the retired guys were able to fly. Then, that evening go home and check the OLC webpage for their flights to see what really happened. You will learn much about weather forecasting in the process. Unfortunately this can also be very painful when you know your friends are out flying huge tasks and you are stuck at work!

### **Teaching old dogs new tricks**

Everyone in the soaring population is not a computer whiz and the OLC is based on modern internet technology. Plenty of good pilots in the past had never taken part in, or even heard of, the OLC for that reason. I am proud of the Moriarty pilots who wanted to participate this year and so they buckled down and learned what they needed to make it happen. Not a single one of us avoided submitting flights just because we were afraid of a computer.

As our thermal weather started in the spring, we hosted a few informal tutorials to introduce the OLC and flight analysis with SeeYou. Everyone was eager and raring to go when they finally began to understand what modern technology could do for them.

Initially as flights are submitted, some will experience a huge variety of “problems” with the *computer*. Whether the problem is really the computer’s fault or actually the user’s fault, it is very frustrating to get all jazzed up about the new contest only to get errors everywhere when you try to submit for your hard-earned miles.

As a first line of defense, I have thrown together a detailed tutorial that explains how to get the job done (see references). When this does not work, it is important to have a local “expert” available that can personally make house calls to walk first time users through the process. Typically one trip is enough because it is a simple process after doing it once or twice. Submitting a flight can be done as quickly as 3-5 minutes with just a few clicks of a mouse from the time the GPS

logger is plugged in to the time the file has been scored with the OLC.

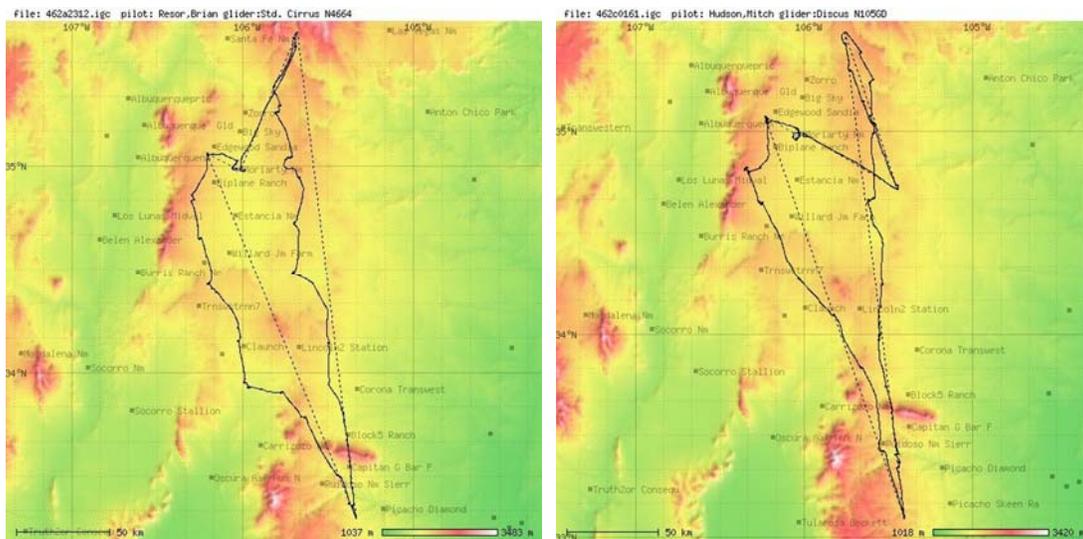
## Required Equipment

A GPS datalogger is needed to participate in this contest. The best option, if you can manage it, is an IGC-approved logger such as a Cambridge, a Volkslogger, etc. Many hand held GPS devices, such as a handheld Garmin with pressure altitude capability, can also be used in the contest. Since these devices are not IGC approved your score will get painted red when the file is submitted. All scores that are painted red will not count in any OLC-International scoring, but they do count towards OLC-USA scoring (this is true as of the 2004 rules). If you want your individual score to count toward international level rankings, then a logger that is IGC approved will be needed.

## Task Strategies

The underlying intention of the OLC contest is to encourage FAI badge and record type task flying (O&R's, 3 turn yo-yo's, FAI triangles), but it gives pilots the option to use up to two more turnpoints to rack up extra points at the reduced rate while close to home after finishing the "main task".

Strategies for flying for OLC points vary a lot depending on your task area and weather patterns. Learning those strategies is part of the fun of this contest. Because the fifth and sixth legs are devalued, the task should be flown in four legs if possible. At Moriarty, it is generally best to pick the direction that will give a nice long leg and go there first. Fly as far as you possibly can in a direction then turn around and head towards home. This will, hopefully, put



*Screenshots from the OLC website with example free distance tasks meant for OLC (color variation indicates topography of the ground). On this day good weather was everywhere and so we first flew south as far as possible. We turned around and headed back north after running into a solid wall of virga near Ruidoso. As I neared the Sangre de Cristos near Santa Fe I ran under a nice little street to get as far north as I felt was safe at the end of the day. My rookie mistake was in ending the flight early. There was enough lift on final glide to put me 3000 feet over final glideslope! A smarter pilot would have continued the 3<sup>rd</sup> leg farther south and then turned home for credit on the 4<sup>th</sup> leg. Mitch Hudson flying with me on the same day knew what to do to get the big points. Part of the fun of the OLC is getting an early start and watching the conditions improve then flying late and trying to judge when that last thermal will be available to get you home.*

you back in the vicinity of the airport later in the day with two full point legs left to work with.

Ideally, at some point during the day work toward a nice street that will take you far from home. Scream down the street as long possible, then either find another one or turn around and go another direction. Around Moriarty, the OLC game often turns into an all-out, high altitude drag race up and down our wonderful dry lines and convergences (thus, the title of this article).

It didn't take long for our pilots to switch from a MAT mentality to the OLC mentality. Those that are used to the old MAT-type tasks would typically bounce around the local area using multiple legs between designated turnpoints. Flying for big OLC points means flying long legs, covering lots of terrain, experiencing a variety of weather, and sometimes getting very far from home.

Some might argue that sticking to the streets does relatively little for soaring skill improvement. You don't stress out about getting to declared turns, or even trying to get to designated points as you



*Sometimes the return trip home looks a little grim, but these are the times when important lessons are learned.*

do in a MAT or AST task.

I say, "Great!"

What this type of flying *does* do is give pilots the chance to rack up tons of miles and experience while staying close to weather that they feel comfortable with while having a blast the whole time. As the level of achievement increases, pilots continually push personal limits to fly farther and farther and are forced to deal with extra challenges along the way. Confidence grows dramatically as these important lessons are learned. There is no motivation for flying smartly like getting yourself stuck 100 miles from home down a cloudstreet that has turned to fuzz!

### **Successes at Moriarty**

The OLC has pulled our pilots closer together as a group and has made us all realize that we can do things in a glider that we never realized. Each of us watches how others are doing on the internet and questions are asked, "Why did you run up that side of the Sangres?", "Why were you using that particular altitude band?", "Were there safe places available to land when you were down on that mountain?", and "How did you get home through the OD from way out *there!*?"

The OLC helped our newer pilots to learn what is achievable in given conditions. In 2004, the 24 Albuquerque pilots flew 88 flights over 500km, 47 over 600km, 16 over 700km, 9 over 800km, and 2 flights over 1,000km. The 1000km flights were the firsts ever flown from Moriarty. Half of our cross country pilots flew more than 3,000 total handicapped miles during the season,

with several racking up as many as 7,500 handicapped miles. As a group, pilots at Moriarty accumulated enough total points to take a commanding lead in the US club standings and finished out the OLC season (running October to October) in 4<sup>th</sup> place of the international standings.



*A culmination of practice and training in 2004 for several at Moriarty was a beautiful out and return flight into Colorado over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on September 11.*

We already are dreaming of next year's goals, which include longer flights by

experienced pilots and more flights by new pilots. The OLC is the perfect follow-up step for new pilots after the one-on-one mentoring stage written about in *Soaring* by Bill Hill and Mike Abernathy in February and January 2004.

Let's try to promote more use of this contest in the USA during 2005. With a little bit of technical computer help from those of us who understand the process, it will really catch on and will raise the level of participation and enthusiasm that we currently have in cross country soaring to a new high. Even if your location does not provide access to premium soaring conditions, it's great fun to track the progress of friends in your area or pilots clear across the country. Albuquerque Soaring at Moriarty challenges everyone in the U.S. to gather your local flying buddies into an OLC club and try to steal the #1 standing in 2005. Fly safely, fly often, fly hard, and submit every flight!

### **Additional Information**

1. Example tutorial on using the OLC: [www.abqsoaring.org/USA-OLCTutorial.pdf](http://www.abqsoaring.org/USA-OLCTutorial.pdf)
2. Billy Hill. "Mentoring." *Soaring*, March 2004.
3. Mike Abernathy. "Cross Country Mentor: Soaring Skill Improvement." *Soaring*, January 2004.