



THE WORLDS IN BRAZIL

What went down in Saquarema? Nico Aubert reports from the FAI Paramotor World Championships

Seven-time Italian paramotor champion Pasquale Biondo won the 2022 Paramotor World Championships in Brazil at the end of April. Held in the beautiful coastal town of Saquarema, near Rio de Janeiro, the competition saw 67 pilots from 11 countries arrive to test themselves in classic competition.

Unlike high-speed slalom, which sees pilots racing low around a pylon course over water, classic competition sets the pilots a variety of tasks that test a broader set of flying skills. Those include

navigation tasks, which is XC using a map rather than a GPS; economy, which tests a pilot's skill in efficient powered and thermal flying; and precision, spot landing or similar low-speed, low-level tasks.

"We had five days of competition," explains France's Nico Aubert, who came sixth overall. "The first day was very intense because they set three navigation tasks for us. Normally we would do one, maybe two maximum. So the first day we were all like, Wow! If we keep this up for the whole week we are going to be destroyed!"

◀▶▶CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Formation flying ahead of the start
Photo: Pawel Kozarowski

Gold medalist Pasquale Biondo
Photo: Farr Films / FAI

The competition venue
Photo: James Simon Zambrano

Ramón Morillas plots his route
Photo: Farr Films / FAI





▲ CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN

Nico Aubert checks his wingtip as he launches

A solo trike takes off

Ready to go in the airfield

Photos: James Zambrano

► OPPOSITE

The view from Alex Mateos's cockpit
Photo: Alex Mateos

One of the low-and-slow precision tasks

Photo: James Zambrano

Formation flying during the opening ceremony

Photo: Farr Films

France's Alex Mateos, who has held the title of Paramotor World Champion since 2014, started as he meant to go on, scoring a full 1,000 points for the first navigation task. Pasquale Biondo was just behind him in second place.

However, the first task also threw up the first problem. Pilots had been given an airspace ceiling of 550m AGL with a 50m margin. But several pilots were disqualified for busting it. "We were all given the same small trackers for scoring, and sometimes they didn't give the same altitude as we had on our instruments," says Nico. "So over the competition a lot of pilots got caught out and scored zero for this situation."

Alex, Pasquale and even Spain's grandmaster, Ramón Morillas, all got caught out at various times in different tasks. "Normally you have to calibrate these trackers every day as the air pressure changes, so this was a little bit of a mess. Because to score a zero when your own altimeter says you are flying at 450m and the other thing shows you at 605m – it's a problem. And it got

a little bit complicated with the director and the scoring team."

Another issue over airspace during an economy task, where pilots must stay in the air as long as possible using a set amount of fuel, also threw up problems and prompted team leaders to lodge protests on behalf of their pilots. "There were [unofficial] no-fly zones, but some pilots flew in them and then protested, and the no-fly zones were then cancelled. So if we'd all known, we would have flown there as it was a good place to fly during the economy task."

It was this task on day two that saw Alex Mateos's golden halo start to slip. Switching off his engine during an economy task to conserve fuel a fault with his engine meant he couldn't re-start in the air. He was forced to land outside the airfield, automatically scoring zero for the task. His final result was fifth overall. "It's been a long time since I've seen the bottom podium," Alex said afterwards. "We defended the colours of France until the end. Now it's time to get back to work and hard training to try to get back there."

'The right winner'

Compared to the pace and nature of pylon-racing competition classic comps are notorious for their slow pace and many rules, which always catch pilots out. But they demand a different set of skills, which are important in general day-to-day flying.

"Tasks in classic competition are quite difficult but they're interesting," says Nico. "Because normally they give us the task and we have to go into quarantine, and everyone has to prepare the task by themselves. So you need to think a lot."

"It's not just flying through slalom circuits, right, left, right, left. You need to think before and during the flight, because maybe during the flight everything can change. The wind direction or your fuel consumption because you need to fly at more RPM, so classic tasks are difficult but interesting."

Things stayed interesting – and controversial – until the very last moment. With nine tasks flown over five days, the pilots were expecting the medals ceremony to take place in the early afternoon and thought they knew their final positions. But an ongoing protest from task 3, an economy task, saw



▲ FLYING IN PARADISE
Pawel Kozarzewski makes the most of the scenery. Saquarema is a surf town east of Rio de Janeiro that has embraced paramotoring.
Photo: Pawel Kozarzewski

the whole task get retrospectively cancelled. "One of the British pilots landed out because he ran out of fuel. And organisers started a new task and he was not on the field, and there is a rule that all the pilots must be on the field before they start a new task," explains Nico. "So the team made a protest and it was upheld. So on the last day, two or three hours before the medals ceremony, the rankings changed. Everything changed at the last moment."

Some pilots went up, some went down. For Pasquale Biondo it was positive – he had scored zero in that task; for Alex it was negative. But ultimately, despite the scoring drama, the "right" pilot won.

"For sure, finally Pasquale won and he was the right guy. Because he flew well and was top five consistently. On the cancelled task he benefitted, but that is the reality of competition. In the end Pasquale flew a great competition, he's the right pilot to win the title."

After the competition Pasquale said it had been a "championship full of emotions". He explained: "The whole team found itself under a strong emotional stress. In the first task the competition was tight and the pressure was very high. Every detail could turn into a loss of points, so the line from winning it all or being off the podium was very thin."


He added: "The Vittorazi team has always supported me, both from a technical and an emotional point of view. I owe this title to them and for this I thank them from the bottom of my heart."

Vittorazi were in Brazil en masse with a full tech team to help Vittorazi pilots. They also took the opportunity to launch their new electronic fuel injection (EFI) technology at the competition, a system they have been working on for four years. Billed as a 'virtual assistant' for pilots it regulates fuel flow, creating a more reliable and efficient motor.

"They've also added a layer of security, so that if you go full-gas immediately, it doesn't transmit straight away, you have to wait five or 10 seconds," explains Nico, who flies Vittorazi. "And this is good because, as you know, in paramotoring we have accidents and that will help reduce accidental full-power accidents."

Vittorazi's general manager Matteo Orazi is also the team leader of the Italian paramotor team and was overjoyed at Pasquale's individual gold, calling it an "unprecedented milestone for the Italian team".

He said: "Such great pride for our company and for Italy! We have been trying for years to win the World Championship in the [solo footlaunch] category and I can say that this time we fought until the last task with the strongest pilots in the world."

"It has been a real team effort and this has rewarded us. We didn't spare a second, we brought over a determination, a strength, a focus that we didn't think we had. My appreciation goes to the Vittorazi pilots and mechanics who deserve all the honours for having contributed to this unprecedented success." 

RESULTS

SOLO FOOTLAUNCH

Gold: Pasquale Biondo (ITA), Vittorazi Master ER / Ozone Viper 5)
Silver: Cyril Planton (FRA, Vittorazi Master / Dudek Warp 2)
Bronze: Jean-Emile Oulha (FRA, Vittorazi Master / Dudek Warp 2)

SOLO TRIKES

Gold: Boris Tysebaert (FRA, Polini Thor 202 / Ozone Viper 5)
Silver: Michael Merle (FRA, Polini Thor 202 / Ozone Freeride)
Bronze: Marcelo Martins (BRA, Vittorazi Master / Sol Auster GT)

NATIONS

Gold: France
Silver: Brazil
Bronze: Qatar

Full results at wpc2022.com.br/en/score. No official medals in the tandem trike category as it was too small to be valid

▲ BRAZIL 2022

The Church of Saquarema formed a scenic backdrop for the whole competition. Sixty-seven pilots from 11 countries took part. Pasquale Biondo, left, centre, is the new solo footlaunch Paramotor World Champion – pictured with Italy's team leader Matteo Orazi and Vittorazi's Andrea Orazi
Photos: James Zambrano / Farr Films