

Launching high in Germany: The 2025 FAI F3B World Championships

By Gavin Tilson

The journey to the 2025 FAI F3B World Championships began long before the first working time call at Nardt Airfield. For the Australian team—pilots Gavin Tilson, Stuart Hamilton, and Simon Watts—it started back in November 2024 with team selection and months of intense preparation. By August, we were ready.

On 3 August, our small crew, including my son Caleb, departed Perth with SporTubes stuffed with high-performance gliders. The route took us via Doha to Berlin, and from there, we drove to Hoyerswerda, our base for the next two weeks. Nardt Airfield, just a short ten-minute drive away, greeted us with its wide-open grasslands, hangar facilities, and an air of anticipation.

In the days leading up to the competition, the once-quiet airfield transformed into a bustling hub. Marquees sprang up, caravans and motorhomes rolled in, and teams from around the world began assembling their gear. Our secret weapon, long-time team supporter and technical guru Thomas Merzhäuser, arrived from Munich with his Tesla crammed full of winches, batteries, and equipment. Together, we spent those first days setting up, practicing, and catching up with old friends—and rivals.

The action kicked off with the Sonnenwendpokal pre-contest, a two-day warm-up event that tested both pilots and organisers. Among the 53 competitors, competition was fierce. We took some early hits—Simon and I both suffered glider damage—but there were highs too. Stuart nailed 26 laps in Distance during Round 3, and I managed a 1000-point 11-lap Distance result. The unpredictable air hinted at the challenges to come.

Sunday's opening ceremony set the tone for the week ahead. The local model flying club put on a spectacular airshow—everything from RC parachutes and control-line combat to a six-engine semi-scale passenger model executing big aerobatics. The star of the show? Martin Weberschock's 5-metre Cirrus glider, powered by a retractable EDF and flown to the *Top Gun* soundtrack executing graceful manoeuvres, punctuated by fast passes and 'high G' F3B turns. It was a reminder of why we all fell in love with this sport.

By Monday morning, it was game time. At 8:30 sharp, Contest Director Peter Hubbertz signalled working time for the start of the World Championships. Forty-three pilots from 13 countries lined up for the Distance task. Stuart came out strong with a 22-lap, 1000-point win and a respectable 18.5-second Speed run. Each day pushed us harder—five to six tasks in relentless sun, temperatures climbing to 35°C, and thermals that seemed to vanish just when you needed them most. Duration flights became a test of patience and nerve; Distance required split-second tactical calls; Speed separated the field with precision and daring.



The numbers tell their own story: Andreas Herrig of Germany flew the only sub-14-second speed run of the event at 13.36 seconds and went on to claim the individual title. Jens Buchert was second followed by Jurgen Polzl. Team Germany topped the podium, with Austria and the Czech Republic in close pursuit. For us Aussies, there was pride in progress—Stu and I improved on our 2023 results, and Simon's first Worlds included a standout 25-lap Distance run (even with the wrong ballast!).

Yet, what made the week truly unforgettable went beyond the competition. A hot-air balloon lifting off over the airfield at sunset. Vintage SG38 glider displays towed by car in the golden hour. A scenic flight in a Wilga that gave us a bird's-eye view of the championship stage. And the camaraderie—fuelled by midweek barbecues, live music, and a lake cruise before the final banquet.

We left Germany grateful—for the organisers' flawless execution, for Thomas and Caleb's tireless behind-the-scenes work (Caleb logged over 25,000 steps a day wrangling winches and lines), and for the support from Rossco and Carla who ensured we were well hydrated and taken care of. Our thanks too to the MAAA, AWA and our home club KAMs for backing our campaign.

F3B is more than a competition; it's a blend of precision engineering, tactical teamwork, and the simple joy of soaring. If you've ever thought about taking on the Formula 1 of Model gliding, join us at the WA State F3B Competition this November. Who knows? The next world champion could be you.

