



2007 Annual Report

by the Chairman ('07) of the
British Parachute Association

Eddie Jones

Good morning fellow Members and guests. Welcome to the forty-first Annual General Meeting of the British Parachute Association. I am sorry that today is a wee bit closer than usual to what we in Scotland call Hogmanay and I thank you all for making the journey to be here today.

My name is Eddie Jones, and I have had the privilege of serving as Chairman of our Association for the last twelve months. My purpose this morning is to review that year.

We remember

When I accepted the nomination as Chairman, I knew that there would be tough times ahead, hard decisions to be made, complex situations to navigate and difficult choices to make.

But nothing can prepare you for when the 'phone rings and on the other end is Tony Butler or John Hitchen bearing the devastating news that there has been a skydiving-related fatality, and someone won't be going home to their loved ones that night.

Three times this year I received such a call, for the following UK skydiving fatalities: Christopher Peak, Iain Firkins and Steve Davis.

I can remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when I received each call. My thoughts then, and now, are with their family and friends.

Also, through natural or non-skydiving causes, or outside the UK, we lost: Pete Best, Alan Brooks, Phil Canning, Simon Hepple, James Kelly, Ken Townsend, Paul Upton and Sir Roland Whitehead.

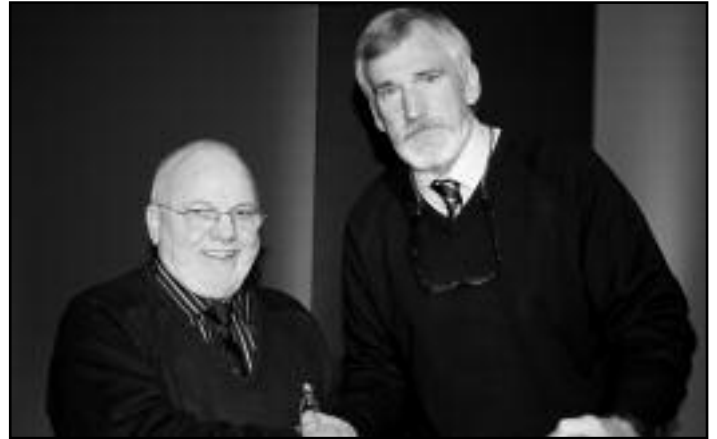
I ask you now to stand and join me in two minutes' silence to remember our lost friends.

Thank you

I would like to acknowledge the valued contributions of:

- Kieran Brady for work with the General Aviation Safety Committee, and on DZ audits
- Debbie Carter, our Treasurer
- Dr John Carter, BPA Medical Adviser
- Tony Knight, our Liaison Officer to CAA.

These people willingly volunteer so many hours of their time, knowledge and expertise on our behalf. Without their highly specialist contributions given for nothing but passion for the sport, your Association could not function. I thank them all.



BPA Chairman 2007 Eddie Jones congratulates John Hitchen and Tony Butler, BPA Safety and Technical Officers, on 25 years of loyal service. Photo: Stuart Meacock



The small, hard-working employed staff of the BPA has continued to do an efficient and effective job of running the Association on a day-to-day basis in accordance with the policy set by your Council. I am most grateful to them all.

2007 saw the remarkable achievement of Tony Butler, our Technical Officer and John Hitchen, our National Coach and Safety Officer, both having reached the milestone of serving on the staff of our Association for 25 years.

This achievement is all the more remarkable because Tony and John are both involved in the regulatory aspects of our sport which, particularly in a small community such as skydiving, is the acid test both of technical ability and personal skills.

John and Tony, we applaud you for your sterling contribution to the BPA, for the golden thread of continuity you have provided for a quarter of a century, and offer you our heartfelt thanks for all you have done during that time, and continue to do now, to help improve safety and training within our sport.

Membership

Someone once asked me what's special about the BPA as an Association. I said, for one thing, it was the only Association I knew that was happy to see its membership in freefall!

But seriously, our Full Membership stands at 5006 which is similar to last year's 5011.

Our Provisional Student Membership is 32,943, which although 12% down on the 37,599 of 2006 is still 11% up on the 29,132 in 2005, so maintaining an underlying trend of growth. And I have to say that I find the outcome for 2007 to be very satisfactory given the wet and windy weather that many parts of the UK endured during June 2007.

Our Temporary Membership has, on the raw figures, decreased by 45% from 987 last year to 542 this year. This partly reflects a change in our rules allowing certain experienced jumpers belonging to our sister national parachuting associations across the EU to jump under their own insurance, where this meets our criteria. As last year, 2000 Joint Services Adventure Training students in the military continue to be included in the Student Membership figures.

Safety and Training

The main reason for the existence of the BPA is to further the highest standards of safety and training in our sport, standards of which we can all be justifiably proud.

In August, the first tribunal was held under the BPA's new disciplinary procedures that had been prepared by BPA Vice President Chris Allen. The Council anticipates that these procedures will be fine-tuned once we have further experience of operating them. My thanks go to Mick Nealis of STC for chairing the first tribunal, and to Paul Ledden of the BPA Council, and Dudley Williams, a member of the English Volleyball Association and a lay arbitrator of the Sports Dispute Resolution Panel, who were its other members.

Now turbine engines might be good on aircraft for parachuting, but wind turbine installations on the ground do not make good neighbours for Parachute Centres.

Twice in 2007 the BPA has been part of a lobby that has successfully objected to the construction of wind turbines that would have been likely to force Peterlee Parachute Centre, the only Centre in the northeast of England, out of business because they would have been likely to have made it unsafe for students to train there. Ian Rosenvinge, Peterlee's DZ Operator, spearheaded two brilliantly successful campaigns to save his Centre. Ian is now the leading expert within our Association on wind turbines – so much so that to listen to him talk on the subject you could be forgiven for thinking he was the man from the electricity board!

Ian is more than willing to share his expertise with any other DZ that may face a similar threat. STC has updated the BPA Operations Manual to cover the risk from wind turbines. For Centres in England, Sport England has a register of Significant Areas for Sports and the BPA is seeking to register as many Affiliated Centres as possible, which may help afford them some protection from incursion by wind turbines.

Instructors

In 2007, we had a total of 50 new Category System Basic Instructors, 6 Tandem Basic Instructors, 3 AFF Basic Instructors, 29 new Category System Instructors, 12 new AFF Instructors, 23 Tandem Instructors, and 3 Advanced Instructors. We now have a total of 492 instructors, an increase of 13 on last year.

We also qualified a total of 47 new Formation Skydiving coaches, 28 Freefly Coaches, 28 Canopy Handling Coaches, 3 Canopy Formation Coaches and 5 Canopy Piloting Coaches.

On the rigging side, we have 14 new Advanced Packers, 3 Advanced Packer upgrades, 5 new Basic Riggers, 2 new Advanced Riggers, and 1 new Examiner Rigger.

I wish to record my thanks for the hard work of Paul Applegate, Riggers' Chairman, and his Riggers' Subcommittee; and Tony Knight, BPA Pilots' Subcommittee Chairman.

I am grateful to John Hitchen, Tony Butler and Trudy Kemp for their efficient course planning and organisation, and also to all the Examiners, Drop Zones and Rigging Lofts that sacrificed their time and facilities during the running of our courses. I also congratulate all our new instructors, examiners, packers and riggers.

Jump numbers

Although we have not as yet received all the club annual returns, a forecast using figures received so far seems to indicate that total jump numbers for the whole country will be about 10% down on the total for 2006. A main cause of this dip was the wet and windy weather last summer.

Awards

The FAI, our International Governing Body, awarded a Diploma for Outstanding Airmanship to USPA Member Chris Gay for his brave in-air rescue of BPA Member Maria Russell over Spain. FAI also made a posthumous award to Tamsin Causer of the Sabiha Gökçen Medal for her skydiving achievements in being the only person ever to partake in four successful World Record Formations simultaneously and also in addition being in three simultaneous British Record formations in different disciplines.

Congratulations to Lesley Gale, on winning a Royal Aero Club Bronze Medal in recognition of her contribution to skydiving, including raising funds for good causes through Brit Chicks and other projects.

Worldwide

The threat of over-zealous European Regulations made by people who do not really understand sport parachuting, or who don't appreciate it from the UK perspective, continues to be a challenge.

The BPA fields a strong team of Paul Moore, Tony Butler, Tony Knight, Kieran Brady and others to rise to this challenge. We are continuing to do everything we can to make sure that the voice of the BPA is heard loud and clear in the legislative heartlands of Europe.

This work is unseen by the majority of our Membership and when I read the occasional cynical comment from a Member asking "What has the BPA ever done for me?", what comes to mind is the vast amount of vital work that goes on in the background just to enable our members to rock up and jump at a BPA Drop Zone. Things do not simply take care of themselves – especially in the growing minefield of European legislation – and the effort that the BPA puts in to this activity call to the highest degree on some of the best technical expertise in our Association. I acknowledge and thank all involved.

John Hitchen is UK Delegate, and John Smyth Alternate Delegate, to the International Parachuting Commission of FAI, the World Air Sports Federation, which is the International Governing Body of our Sport.

Competitions International

Our teams flew successfully at the World Cup 2007 against in many cases professional competition from other nations. They demonstrated the kind of sporting spirit and good humour by which the UK has come to be known.

In the Artistics World Cup in Stupino, Russia, in August, team *Outbreak* – Mike Carpenter, Jim Harris and Andy Newell – took Silver in Freefly and were only point three short of Gold! This shows incredible skill now and exceptional promise for the future. The team has acknowledged that BPA support for coaching for elite teams helped them to reach this standard.

In 4-way FS, our teams bagged three Golds, two Silvers and a Bronze at the finals of the European Skydiving League in Belgium.

In the emerging discipline of Vertical Relative Work or Vertical Formation Skydiving, team UK VRW took Gold at the first European Championships. Well done Mike Carpenter, Andy Ford, Jim Harris, Andy Lovemore and Dan Parker. The BPA supports calls for IPC formally to recognise this new discipline at world level.

In Speed Skydiving, Clare Murphy sponsored by Hinton Skydiving Centre, took first place in the overall women's event at the World Cup. She also set a new World Record reaching an average speed of 275.09 miles per hour. The BPA would also like to see IPC formally recognise Speed Skydiving at world level.

In addition to thanking our Competitions Committee Chairman Geordie Page for his overall co-ordination of our competitions activity both regionally, nationally and internationally, I should like to thank our Competitions Discipline Reps for the immense amount of hard work they have done, much of it behind-the-scenes, to organise and promote their discipline. They are Weed Stoodley – Artistics; Chris Hollis – FS; Ian Marshall – Canopy Formation; Alex Wilson – Canopy Piloting; Clare Murphy – Speed Skydiving; and Geordie Page – Classics.

Nationals and Grand Prix

We held a programme of domestic competitions – Nationals and Grand Prix – across the disciplines in 2007. Thank you to all the competitors who took part, and to the Drop Zones that so ably hosted the competitions.

We are always keen to encourage more competitors in all disciplines, and are proud to have held our first Nationals in Canopy Piloting last summer. Congratulations to Brian Vacher who achieved the performance criteria for BPA funding towards his training for the World Championships.

I was proud to attend the FS and Artistics Nationals myself to present the trophies and medals. The atmosphere and camaraderie is tremendous, and everyone gets a real buzz from being a part of it.

We boast the second largest FS Nationals in the world, after the USA, and have had our biggest Artistics Nationals ever in 2007, with 24 teams and the standard of flying reaching an all-time high. 4-way FS team *Storm*, Freefly team *Outbreak* – now called team *Volairkix* – and Male Freestyle team *Killa 'n' Parker* qualified for BPA funding by achieving a performance equal to or better than fourth place at the last World Championships in their event. *Killa 'n' Parker* declined funding since *Killa*, otherwise known as Adam Mattacola, is a member of team *Volairkix* to which he wishes to devote his energies.

The winners of the Nationals in most events were presented with their medals and trophies at the end of their meets; the winners of the Overall Grand Prix Championships will be presented with medals later this morning. Well done to all the teams and individuals who have won a medal or trophy.

Coaching Roadshows

The Coaching Roadshows have again been successful in 2007, and were arguably a prime reason for the healthy number of entries to our National and Grand Prix competitions.

It goes without saying that without coaches there can be no Coaching Roadshows. To this end I would like to thank all the coaches for their contribution.

The Competitions Committee intends to continue running Skills Coaching Roadshows for non seniors in the 2008 season. If you want one at your DZ, ask your DZ Operator to make a request to the Discipline Rep on the new Competitions Committee for 2008.

Kate Charters has completed another hard-working year as Judges Co-ordinator, co-ordinating judges to competitions and organising their training seminars. Without Judges there just cannot be competitions, a big thank you to all our Judges for your contribution this year.

In 2007, we welcomed the following newly rated National Judges: In Accuracy – Paul Moore and Dave Openshaw; and in Canopy Piloting – Bob Charters, Ann Fowler, Frank Mallabone, Paul Moore and Dave Openshaw.

Records

A new World Record was set at the Florida Skydiving Center at Lake Wales, Florida, USA on 21 November 2007. 100 parachutists linked up under canopy to form the largest parachute diamond formation ever created. The parachutists came from 14 countries – including a UK contingent of 6 BPA Members – Gavin McLeod, Ian Marshall, Maria Russell, Martin Robiette, Paul Speller and Doug Preston.

10 Brits were part of the 40-way European Head Down Freefly Record held in Empuriabrava. Well done to Mike Carpenter, Alec Cotton, James Davies, Andy Ford, Matt O'Riordan, Jim Harris, Adam Mattacola, Andy Newell, Dan Parker and Martin Reynolds.

Not content with that, 11 British Freeflyers set a British Head Down Freefly Record of 11, a number that no doubt they will soon better considering the re-emergence and incredible skills level we now have in the UK. Congratulations to Mark Joyner, Andy Ford, Jim Harris, Martin Reynolds, Dan Parker, Mike Carpenter, Matt O'Riordan, Andy Newell, Adam Mattacola, James Davies and Alec Cotton.

2007 saw the ever-active *Brit Chicks* build a 68-way Red Cross Formation over Langar. During the year, *Brit Chicks* raised over £40,000 for the Red Cross – a magnificent, public-spirited, achievement.

It also saw the Z-Team largest sequential, 139-way, over Skydive City, Florida, in March in which these BPA Members took part: Tony Bradbury, Simon Bristow, Simon Darch, Mike Ehlas, Ruth Green, Charlie Hoare, Gordon Hodgkinson, Gareth Holder, John Kallend, Tom Leonard, Dave Lewis, Milko, Fiona Robinson, Dave Ruffell, Graham Stone, Derek Thomas, Kyle Thomas, Billy Payn, Craig Poxon and Garry Willard.

Development

The Development Committee, under the Chairmanship of Robin Durie, held a Drop Zone Operators' Forum in April 2007, the cost of which was kindly met by the Army Parachute Association.

The cost of insurance was a hot topic then, as it was at a special meeting for Drop Zone Operators specifically on insurance that was called by the BPA on 6 September. I shall have some good news about the cost of insurance later, for now I should like to pay tribute to the hard work done by David Hickling and the members of his Insurance Subcommittee throughout the year. They have literally left no stone unturned in the quest for the best value insurance for us all.

The Development Committee has made available grants for Clubs & Centres to help meet the cost of bringing in experts to speak at safety evenings. Grants are still available and this is the time of year in which BPA Centres are especially encouraged to apply. If your Centre is interested, please get in touch with the BPA Office.

The Development Committee also oversaw the launch of the Airkix Fund, initially a one year project involving the Airkix Wind Tunnel in Milton Keynes and the BPA, designed to raise funds for good skydiving causes by a special offer for BPA Members to take three friends to experience the wind tunnel. There is now a sum of over £1,000 in the Fund, all of which can all be put to good use as Airkix has kindly agreed to meet the set-up costs. It will be interesting to see what happens in the future, whether the Airkix Fund continues in some form or not.

Communications

The Association's Skydive Magazine under the policy direction of Adrian Bond's Communications Committee and the Editorship of Lesley Gale has continued to serve the Membership well throughout 2007. Plans for the latest update of the Starter Mag are well in hand.

In the December issue of the Mag we again included, free-of-charge, the BPA Skydiving Calendar containing some superb images of our sport.

The Communications Committee has also been involved in a number of other initiatives, such as preparation for the BPA's first online membership survey in 2008.

Council 2007

I wish to thank all Members of Council 2007 for their contribution to the running of our sport. We have had plenty of discussion and debate, not to mention controversy, around the Council table in the year just passed. All of it stems from the genuine passion that everyone on the Council shares in our sport.

I should like to thank the Chairmen of the main Committees of Council – Robin Durie, Development; Adrian Bond, Communications; John Hitchen, STC; and Geordie Page, Competitions.

Council 2007 for the first time offered Members the option to be able to vote online in the election of the Council for 2008. Just over 43% of votes were cast online. Whilst the majority of just over 56% were traditional postal votes, there was clearly a demand for the online option. The ease of access to vote online is undoubtedly a factor in a voting rate of 22.6% this year, which is 80% up on last year's 12.5% – a big move in the right direction.

UK Sport

UK Sport provided the BPA with an exchequer grant from the public purse of £25K in 2007 but that the grant will be halved in 2008 and after that the funding will stop entirely. This is because of government policy to channel public funding into the 2012 London Olympics and Olympic Sports. Your Council supports the Olympics but considers current public policy to be short-sighted in restricting funding to Olympic sports – there are many other worthwhile sports, including ours that deserve better than what appears to be almost summary dismissal.

The Development Committee is continuing with its Income Streams Working Party to seek to identify other possible sources of income for the BPA to make up the shortfall from UK Sport. John Horne, as Working Party Chairman, has brainstormed a number of interesting ideas that will no doubt be honed in the year to come.

Insurance

They say what goes up must come down and I'm delighted to say that, at last, this old adage has come true for BPA Insurance. The BPA has received four quotations for insurance for the year beginning on 1 April 2008. This has been achieved because actual and reserved claims and costs allow it. It has also been achieved by the hard work of David Hickling, Chairman of the BPA Insurance Subcommittee – Kieran Brady, Paul Moore, Robin Durie and myself – with the help of Tony Butler, John Hitchen and Martin Shuttleworth on the staff.

The BPA's strong track record on safety and training, which has been recognised and commended by the insurers, has not only avoided an increase in premium next year, but has enabled the insurers to offer a year-on-year reduction. Although the number of insurance claims each year has fallen over the last few years, the average value of each claim has increased significantly. So the cost of the premium is now effectively determined by a small number of big claims.

The high standard of safety in parachuting means that the few high value claims the policy suffers are usually in respect of unpredictable accidents that have not been eliminated by our sport's proactive risk management and robust safety management systems. They represent the residual risk that the BPA is constantly striving to reduce even further. Our sport therefore enjoys the security and protection of its umbrella insurance policy whenever and wherever this residual risk may give rise to a claim.

A fundamental tenet of our Association, as a not-for-profit membership body, is one-for-all, all-for-one, and the premium quotation for next year demonstrates that the cost of insurance is reactive. Next year, providing there are no big new claims between now and April, it looks set that we shall all benefit from what is effectively a 'lower claims' discount of around 12.5% in the insurance premium.

This will lead, for the first time that I can remember, to a proposed reduction in the overall BPA subscription of over £11 for full Members and £2.85 for Student Provisional Members for next year. Debbie Carter, our Treasurer, will be presenting the figures to you shortly.

Summary

In summary, looking back at 2007, the Association is in good shape, with full time membership of just over 5,000, a £25,000 public exchequer grant from UK Sport. We have continued to make the UK's voice heard in Europe and are one of the leaders in the European Parachuting. We are strong competitors on the international scene and 2007 has seen that strength grow in a number of disciplines, particularly in Freely. We have displayed a firm commitment to improving our top teams by supporting elite coaching and helping our up-and-coming athletes with free-of-charge BPA-sponsored Skills Coaching Roadshows. We have made it easier for you to vote by inaugurating online voting, and have increased the participation rate in voting by 80% on last year.

And, to top it all, we have achieved what we thought would be impossible – unless there are any big new insurance claims between now and April, we shall see a reduction in the cost of insurance allowing a reduction in the overall BPA subscription for the first time I can remember.

It's certainly been a year of achievement on my watch, and you obviously think I deserve a bit of a rest this year, so let me wish the Members of the new Council 2008 well. Let me also say that my commitment to our Association is even stronger than ever, and I shall be available to be at your service in the future.

AGM

Ladies and gentlemen, the Annual General Meeting is about learning, meeting with friends old and new, and most importantly, having a good time.

We're generally sticking to our tried-and-trusted format today, although you will have noticed that the formal Annual Dinner has been replaced, on a trial basis, by a buffet with the tantalising title 'Tastes of the World'. To find out exactly what this means, you'll have to come to this room at 8pm tonight bearing your ticket.

All I can say is that the hotel says the dishes will be "influenced by culinary traditions from different parts of the world". I won't comment on a rumour I heard in the bar last night that the modern culinary classic from north of the border – Deep Fried Mars Bars – might be included. But if it is – save one for me!

I do hope that you enjoy yourselves today, and thank you for listening.

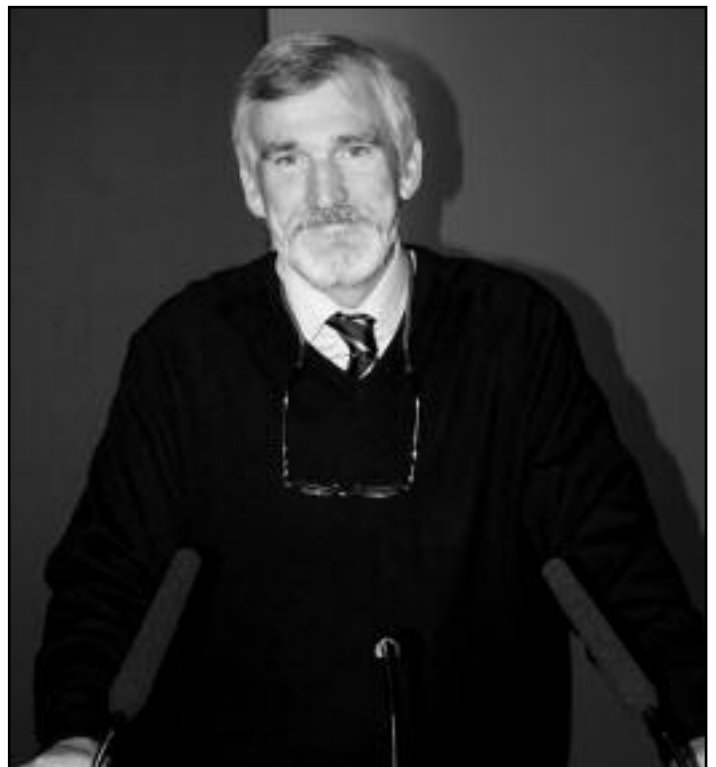


Photo: Stuart Meccock

Eddie Jones
BPA Chairman 2007