

LINE TOUCH COMPETITION FLYING

This article is a description of lessons I've learned from competing in line touch competitions. Hopefully it will provide you with an idea or two that will increase your wins in line touch competitions you enter!

In line touch competition flying I believe there are three general sets of skills needed for being a consistent winner;

- A. well practiced flying skills, which means 'KNOW YOUR KITE'**
- B. observation skills, which includes watching your opponent's kite relative to yours**
- C. strategy skills & mind awareness, staying focused on the point at hand**

Learning as many of the skills needed certainly improves your odds of consistently winning. However, just because you think some, or even all, of your skills don't match up to competitors', doesn't mean you will lose. It's the combination of many factors that decide the outcome of a competitive line touch point and match. Neither you nor your competitors have control of them all, so don't forget that you always have an opportunity to win.

For example, you can't control the wind or wind shifts, your opponent's frame of mind or the position of the sun. And any ONE of these factors can dramatically tilt the odds in your favor, even if you think your opponent has better flying skills than you.

I urge you not to deprive yourself of the learning experiences, fun and excitement of competing just because you don't think you're a 'good enough' flyer to compete. All line touch competitors feel lacking in some skills because no flyer is a 'master' or a 'perfect' flyer and no one ever can be. That's the nature and one of the beauties of fighter kite flying.

1. LEARN TO TUNE YOUR KITES.

In the flying skills area learning to recognize when your kite is properly tuned is very important. The only way to learn about tuning and adjusting your kite is to **LEARN THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION!**

You read it correctly, **experimenting is what it takes**. Adjust every adjustable aspect of the bridle and spine but only one aspect or element at a time, then fly the kite after each change you make and notice the difference in the way the kite flies and make mental or written notes about what you noticed.....continue with this until you feel you can predict what the kite will do when you make any specific minor adjustment. Yes, this takes a little time but I know of no short cuts.

2. LEARN FLYING SKILLS

When flying solo, the only set of skills you can practice is flying skills and this is one of the most important sets of skills to know. However, if you have access to a 'FairStart' device, you can also practice the strategies and skills involved in the starting of a point. How a point starts can be very important in determining the outcome. So learning how to respond at the start can improve your wins.

When competing against experienced competition line touch flyers, it's my experience the following flying skills are extremely important in getting you consistently into the 'winners circle'. **These skills can all be practiced and learned by flying solo.**

Practice, and tons of it, is the way to gain these skillsI know of no short cuts. These skills are not listed in any particular order and are not necessarily equally important one to the other, except when you need to apply one during a competition, at that moment it is the MOST important skill to have.

- a. Change the direction of the kite at any moment during flight. This means immediately and at the exact moment **you** want the kite to change direction. It does not mean; when given enough time, you can get the kite to change directions.

This brings up a non flying skill that is essential to solo practicing if you really want to improve your flying skills; **Be completely honest with yourself.**

For example, it's easy to tell or convince yourself you made the kite change directions exactly when you wanted it to. However, in reality the kite, **not you**, actually may have determined the time of the direction change. Be brutally honest with yourself! And be super observant of what actually is happening with the kite, the line and with your manipulation of the line. Being totally honest with yourself about what you are observing during practice will accelerate your learning by at least 100%.

- b. Change the direction of the kite's spin on command. Again this means immediately when you want the spin to change directions.
- c. Get the kite to initiate a spin on command.
- d. Get the kite to stop a spin on command.
- e. Be able to stop the kite dead in its tracks, on command, anywhere within the wind window. Again this means the moment you want the kite to stop not when the kite is ready to stop.
- f. Change the direction of the kite's travel 180 degrees without having the kite spin prior to heading in its new direction. To practice this, as soon as the kite's horizontal path is established, change the direction of travel by 180 degrees, and repeat this until you get tired of it. Do it with the kite at different elevations and at different angles.
- g. Spinning the kite so the wingtips are no higher off the ground than 18". And being able to sustain that spinning for at least 30 seconds to a minute. And be able to change the direction of the spin during that period.....of course, without ever having the kite touch the ground.
- h. Fly the kite above and behind you. The kite should be far enough behind you that you almost lose your balance when you lean back to see it. And when the kite is in this position, you must be able to control the direction the kite travels on command and also control the direction of the spin and when the kite spins.

- i. Fly the kite to either side of you so it is at the very edge of the wind window or slightly beyond it. Then control the direction of travel, spin direction and position of the kite on command.
- j. Pulling or retrieving line at a very rapid pace. Whatever your current speed or rate of pulling, you'll be better off if you can double that speed at least. Practice reaching farther for each line pull and moving your arms more quickly and smoothly.
- k. Be able to adjust the direction of the kite very slightly when pulling in line without causing the kite to spin or radically change its direction. For example, make the kite change its tracking angle by about 2%-3% either up or down from its current path.
- l. Stall the kite in any position in the wind window. This can be in the form of floating or in a 'cobra' position; it's best to know how to do both.
- m. Maintain the 'cobra' position while raising and lowering the distance from the ground of the tail of the kite from touching the ground to much higher. During this 'corbra' the kite is not spinning or turning, just standing upright with its nose pointed upward. This is easiest with light wind, having the kite directly down wind and the tow connection loop positioned a little lower than normal will also assist in doing this for the first time. After that, you can do the 'cobra' with normal bridle settings. The 'cobra' isn't often a successful competition maneuver but it requires very good control of your kite and line. And that is useful for all maneuvers.
- n. Cause the kite to make an 'outside loop' at the edge of the wind window. This is effective both near the ground and at higher elevations. In order to help with this, increase the bend in the spine of the kite.
- o. When in a fast nosedive toward the ground, at the moment you want, make the kite float out away from you; it's best if you can do it with the kite floating no higher than 12" off the ground.
- p. Fly the kite in a complete circle around you. For this it is best to practice it when the wind is 5 mph or less. The higher the wind speed, the more difficult this is to do. And until you actually do it one time, it is difficult to get the feel for it, especially in higher winds.
- q. When in a fast nosedive toward the ground, as the kite approaches being 18" from the ground make it do a 90 degree turn either to the right or left without having the kite spin first. In other words, the kite will be heading down at a high speed then turn 90 degrees, either right or left and begin flying in a horizontal path about 18" above the ground.
- r. Control the kite's direction and spin, but do it while lengthening the flying line. This is done by 'pumping' the flying line instead of pulling or retrieving it. Pulling or retrieving line shortens your line....pumping can provide complete control of the kite just like when pulling line but allows you to lengthen your flying line a little at the same time. Some flyers pump the kite using one hand, others use two. Once you get the feel of it, it's easy.

- s. Control your kite and know exactly where it is located without looking at it all the time. The reason for this is that sometimes you need to watch the opponent's kite almost as much as your own without losing sight or control of your kite.

These are the majority of the flying skills I know of that can benefit you in line touch competitions. And if you can accomplish these, others you will easily develop on your own. And in many cases you'll make up a skill or maneuver that works better than ones listed. **There is no 'right way' to fly fighter kites except the way that works best for you.** Most competition line touch flyers can perform all of the listed skills..... they can do some skills better than others and none as well as they'd like; so they're practicing just like you and me.....and most of the time practicing solo.

3. FLYING SPACE IS A HEMISPHERE

One of the realities a competition flyer must face is that each competitor in a match is in the center of a hemisphere. This hemisphere is described by their flying line and the ground.

As a fighter kite flyer, you are at the bottom and in the center of a hemisphere. The ground is the bottom of the hemisphere and your flying line describes all of the above ground space you fly in.

The kite flying space is 360* around the flyer horizontally and 180* up, over and in back of the flyer, and from one side over the flyer's head to the other side. This hemisphere is the total competition space your kite needs to control.

A battle for a point could occur in any part of this hemisphere of space and if you want to win the point, you need complete control of your kite in ALL this space. It isn't really possible to effectively practice flying in all areas of the hemisphere, but you can practice flying in most of it.

A good beginning is to practice flying your kite in 360* circles around you. It's best to practice this on light wind days, generally when the wind is blowing less than 5 mph is the best condition for flying your kite all the way around you.

Also, fly it from the front, straight up overhead, then in back of you and down to the ground in back of you. Once you do either, you will have the feeling about how to do it and it will be easier for you to repeat it.

4. TIMING & PREDICTING KITE SPEEDS

Successful competition line touch flying is largely about accurately timing and predicting the speed and direction of your kite relative to your opponent's kite. And, of course, it's best to be able to control the direction and speed of your kite.

It's simple in theory, but as with many things, a little tougher in the real world. To become a top line touch competition fighter kite flyer it takes practice flying your kite and practice flying against competitors, lots of practice.

5. IS A TOP POINT OR BOTTOM POINT EASIEST TO WIN?

A question I often get asked by newer line touch competitors is 'Which is the easiest point to win; top or bottom?' From my experience it is partly dependent on the particular flying skills you have developed, partly how your kite flies and how it's tuned, and all of this is relative to your opponent's capabilities. I know, that isn't much of an answer.

The truth is both are equally easy to win if you know the right things to do and you have adequate control of your kite. **Control of your kite is the key!** By control I mean that **you** determine **what** the kite does and **when** it does it. This requires enough flying practice so you know your kite inside and out!

6. THE GROUND IS YOUR WORST ENEMY

If you're not familiar with line touch rules, you lose a point if your kite is the first to touch the ground prior to a point being won by either flyer.

A HARSH REALITY in most competitions I have seen and participated in, the ground takes more points than all flyers combined! **Grounding is a more threatening enemy than the opponent.** It's interesting to me that most of the time when flyers discuss grounding; it's assumed the grounding occurred in the pursuit of a bottom point.

My experience has shown that the ground actually takes both top and bottom points almost equally. It's difficult to believe I know, but all you need to do is pay close attention to the next few competitions you watch or participate in and see for yourself.

To minimize grounding, practice flying your kite in all sectors of the wind window and learn how your kites perform in each portion of the wind window. In a competition often it's the last kite in the air that wins the point; don't donate a point to your opponent by needlessly grounding your kite because you were unaware of what your kite would do in a particular area of the wind window. Know your kite and know how it behaves!

There are basically two types of groundings:

- A. Most groundings I view as 'gift giving' or the same as giving your opponent a 'free' point because the grounding is usually from over eagerness to 'win' the point, from lack of knowing how your kite behaves or from poor kite tuning. Such a grounding allows your opponent to win the point without earning it, other than they're kite stayed in the air longer than yours. All they had to do to get the point was to be in the air when you grounded. How nice a gift is that!
- B. However, there are situations where grounding is the result of very daring and skilled kite flying. In those cases you have decided to take a high risk and you lost. Your opponent earned that point because their kite probably forced you into making that high risk choice and you were unable to pull off the maneuver for whatever the reason.

7. HOW LOW IS LOW ENOUGH?

An interesting misconception many flyers have about bottom points is they believe to win a bottom point your kite must be only inches above the ground. **The reality is most bottom points are earned higher above the ground than most flyers realize.** Watch carefully the next time you participate or watch a line touch competition and see for yourself. Of course

there are some points earned where the kite is millimeters above the ground and those are wonderful points to win, but those are rare in any competition I've participated in or watched.

Here are some reasons why the bottom points are earned higher off the ground than people think.

- A. Both flyers are often afraid of grounding their kites and avoid getting them too close to the ground. There is often good cause for concern about this issue because the wind close to the ground is often much less predictable than the wind 8' above ground.
- B. Another reason is, even though both flyers' kites are kept near the ground, one of the flyer's kites eventually becomes high enough to lure the opponent in to believing they can come underneath the line and win.

This can be on purpose as a strategy or accidental. If it's on purpose, here's what can win points: because your opponent sees your kite line high enough to make a quick and easy point, or so they think; up the opponent's kite comes to attack your line.

However, as the opponent's kite is heading up toward your line to get under it, you dive your kite toward the ground just ahead of the opponent's kite, make the kite cut back toward the opponent and come under the opponent's line winning the point. All of this maneuvering will usually occur in milliseconds and at an elevation usually 6'-8' or higher above the ground.

8. WHY DON'T I WIN MORE POINTS IN FIGHTER KITE LINE-TOUCH COMPETITIONS?

This is a question I hear or overhear from flyers at almost every line touch competition I attend. Really it's a very good question; why don't you win more points?

You have good or even top performing kites, your kites are tuned precisely, you know how to fly virtually every fighter kite maneuver there is, you understand the wind and you know how to handle your flying line; so why don't you win more often? Here's my take on it.

Competition line touch flying is partly a test about how well you can accurately time and predict the speed and direction of your kite relative to your opponent's kite.....along with being able to control the direction and speed of your kite. Even if you have the skills to accomplish this, it usually requires a flyer's full attention to do it.

Successful competitive line-touch fighter kite flying requires an unusually high degree of concentrated attention. This 'concentrated attention' issue is one that I believe is fundamental to successful line touch competition flying.

However, it's an issue rarely discussed when flyers gather to discuss their various competition experiences. It may simply be flyers concentrate their attention automatically, without thinking about it; or they may not believe it's necessary or they may never have thought about it.

My belief is your full concentrated attention on your kite, your opponent's kite, your line and the wind will contribute more to your fighter kite line touch competition successes than you can imagine.

After flyers lose a point or match, I sometimes hear them talking about how they were not 'up to their game'; that 'they NEVER fly so poorly in practice', and sadly, it's probably all true. Isn't it interesting that EXACTLY at the moment when they truly want to be the best fighter kite flyer they can be, they under perform. Why?

Here's one possible reason. During line-touch competitions I've noticed that competitors often become engulfed with many distractions of the competition. They bog themselves down with distractions such as: what their standings are in the competition, how will the outcome of this next match affect their standings, worrying about how their kite will perform against a 'hot' design of their next competitor's, replaying in their mind the last point or match they won or lost, wishing and hoping to win this match or point at hand, thinking about the last match their opponent just won against a 'very good' flyer, worrying that the wind is stronger than they are used to flying in, wondering if they are 'really good enough to win this point or match', worrying about their next match with a flyer who is 'really good', wishing and hoping to be the winner of the entire competition and on and on they go with these mind filling distractions.

When a flyer is carrying such a load of distractions in their mind, it's my belief they can't focus adequately to flying their kite. And I believe this is the basis for flyers losing more points than they need to. I know it's true for me. When I discovered this, I began working at changing, and the following is what I have changed about myself.

When I fly in line touch competitions, obviously I'm there to win as many points in each match as I can; just the same as each competitor. However, ***I don't think about winning or being the winner***; not in a general sense for the competition as a whole, not for a given match or even a given point. That isn't where my attention is. That isn't the place where my attention will earn points.

Instead I direct virtually all attention to flying my kite at each moment during a point, the rest of my attention is watching what my opponent's kite is doing. By doing this I give myself the ONLY opportunity I have to win that point. My attention is not on the outcome or wishful outcome of any point or match but concentrated on the details of flying and controlling my kite to the conclusion of the current point.

What I know for certain is NONE of that other 'stuff' outside of flying my kite and watching my opponent's kite is going to assist me in winning even one point. Why clutter my mind with it?

9. THE QUICKER THE ATTACK, THE BETTER

Some flyers believe in the strategy that the quicker they attack, the quicker they will win the point. Although it's true in some cases, usually, quick attacking results in losing control of your kite in the excitement of the 'instant' attack and your expected win and instead, the point is lost. This occurs partially because the flyer is focusing on their perceived quick, easy win and not on controlling and flying their kite in a way that will position it for a win.

Having patience as a strategy is more valuable than being the quickest off the starting mark for most points I've participated in or watched. In fact developing a sense of patience is very difficult for many fighter kite competitors. For some reason flyers in general, and newer flyers especially, seem eager to attack the instant a point is started.

Rev 8 2006 Bruce Lambert

If a quick attacking strategy has earned you many wins, then stick with it. However, if it hasn't produced the wins you wish for, try a strategy of patience and taking the time to position your kite for a low risk win.

I hope you find an idea or part of an idea in this article that helps you develop additional ways to win more points in every line touch competition you enter!

BigGrins, bruce
kitefighter@nwinfo.net