



Left: the ungainly-looking Mil-2 is extremely effective in skilled hands
Below: UK winners on the podium, from left, team manager John Matchett, Imogen Asker, Caroline Gough-Cooper, David Monks, Jonathan Penny, Andrew Tae, Mike Buckland



infraction. As a result, in the slalom event – in which a bucket of water is carried on a rope between 12 gates in three and a half minutes before being deposited on a table – it had been decided that if time was getting short, crews should sacrifice gates at ten points each in order to avoid losing 80 points by not getting the bucket on the table. Several crews from three countries did that, only to be docked double points by the Russian chief judge, Irina Grushina, who claimed that if one gate was missed, that meant the next was taken out of sequence, which incurred another ten-point penalty. The British protested that this interpretation of the rules was totally different from the way they were applied at the last two championships in France and Austria, and that

if such a change was to be made, teams should be notified in advance. The Russian judge maintained that the last two championships must have been wrongly scored; at one point there was the odd spectacle of Ms Grushina arguing the nuances of English grammar, but she was clearly immovable. To lodge a formal protest with the jury would have cost 600 euros, and it didn't make much difference to the team scores. Team GB manager John Matchett was emollient. "We just have to take it on the chin and get on with the next event," he said. Other team members were less accommodating. "It's a farce," said one. "It's not fair play when your entire team tactics can be undermined, and it's demoralising to be penalised in an underhand way."

Ironically, the organisation of the Eisenach event was far superior to that of the last championships three years ago in Rouen, when cheating was endemic and unchecked by the judges. Following that dismal experience, CIG cracked down on some of the worst infractions, and the German organisers led by Konrad Giessler ensured that this year the quarantine areas were not violated, that mobile phones were kept from teams that had completed the navigation exercises, that crews were unable to masquerade as each other and that only official maps were allowed in helicopters. The Germans put no fewer than 46 judges in the field, making it very difficult to get away with any infraction.

The Championship events closely replicate the real world of search and rescue – precise height-holding and hover-taxying, extremely accurate navigation and searching, and skilled work with the underslung load. The Russians are undeniably highly skilled and a joy to watch; the best of them incurred virtually no penalty points on some events, an extraordinary achievement. John Matchett commented that the standard of flying was far and away the highest he had seen as a veteran of five world championships. The Mil Mi-2, flown by all the Russian teams, looks ungainly but it is an excellent helicopter for this kind of work, with ample excess power and good tail rotor authority.

The CIG is set to discuss the format of the World Championships at its next meeting, but whether anything will change in time for the next competition in 2011 is moot; for the Russians, it's an international hairy-chest competition they do not intend to lose, and the next World Championships will be held in Russia.

Top British scorers were Caroline Gough-Cooper and Imogen Asker (R22) who came 9th out of the 43 teams. David Monks and Jonathan Penny (R22) came 16th, followed by Andrew Tae and Mike Buckland (B206) in 17th place. Team GB achieved a podium finish, with the Russians in first place with 3730,8 points, the hosts second with 3484.4, and the British in bronze medal position with 3256.2. ■

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