

eScoring explainer

'eScoring' is a way in which a competition pilot or their spotter can use a smartphone to enter their score after each flight. It's part of the 'GliderScore' software. It's attracting particular attention during the pandemic as an important way to preserve social distancing and minimise risk from handling score cards.

GliderScore

GliderScore is free¹ PC software used all over the world for running radio-controlled glider competitions. It has templates for all kinds of glider competition² but is particularly useful for F5J, F3K and any other thermal competitions³ run in matrixed slots. It handles pretty much all aspects of a contest: matrixing, producing documents, timing slots (running the audio for the PA + any video display). It's not difficult to use but there is a bit of a learning curve and experienced help is useful to get started.

- To use GliderScore, download from: <http://www.gliderscore.com/>
- Help is available on the BARCS forum: <https://www.barcs.co.uk/forums/forum/100-covid-and-escoring/>

eScoring

Traditionally, scores are entered in GliderScore by the CD, using a laptop. eScoring is an optional part of GliderScore, which instead allows each pilot (or their spotter⁴) to enter their own scores direct into GliderScore, using a smartphone to connect to a copy of the competition on a cloud server. (Also possible to keep an eye on overall scores on the phone as the competition progresses). Pre-pandemic, UK CDs fought shy of the additional technology of eScoring, and of asking pilots to use it. During the pandemic, the need for social distancing makes eScoring very attractive indeed: pilots and spotters do not need to approach the CD's table; no shouting out scores; no Score Cards

¹ Developer Gerry Carter, does a magnificent job, has costs and is happy to receive voluntary contributions if you get into using GliderScore: <http://www.gliderscore.com/Donate.aspx>

² Including F3F and F5B though not used in the UK for these disciplines. And including the emergent F5K and F3RES classes.

³ Easy to tailor GliderScore ALES template to whatever scoring system is used in local club comps etc.. And not difficult to customise PA announcements

⁴ Or anyone else can do it for them. Not a problem that some pilots / spotters will not be in a position to do it themselves.

handled by more than one person. After the pandemic, it will surely stay in use? – eScoring has advantages beyond social distancing and we'll be used to making it work.

- To use eScoring as a CD with a laptop
 - Before the competition, in GliderScore the CD⁵ checks the 'QR codes box' when printing Score Cards or Score Records⁶.
 - During the competition, the 'eScoring' button on the 'Competition Setup' gives the CD access to running eScoring.
- To use eScoring as a pilot / spotter with a smartphone
 - Beginning of the competition, scan the QR code to get to the pilot's input page
 - After each flight, enter the scores.

eScoring in practice

Experience with eScoring in the UK is limited and we need to learn from each other as that experience develops further. Pioneers include Tony Merritt (informal F5J competitions in Essex)⁷ and Paul Robinson and other F3K fliers (the only class to have managed to run a BMFA league in 2020). Tony offers **these thoughts** on his experience so far (to which I've added some *comments and links*)

1. "The eScoring system is very good from a CD's perspective - a lot less work."

CD needs on the field a laptop or similar, with access⁸ to the copy of the competition on the cloud server to which pilots or spotters are inputting scores. Because the CD is not routinely entering all the scores themselves, they can concentrate instead on spotting and handling any problems (and on their own flying!)

2. "The eScoring system is a pain when it bails out during a contest."

⁵ It's easy for a GliderScore competition to be set up by one person on one PC and run by someone else on another (Export and Import facility.) But not if eScoring is in use – must be run from the same machine the competition was created on.

⁶ GliderScore offers both. Without eScoring, 'Score Cards' are normally used: small booklet for each pilot with a page per each flight, filled in, torn off and handed to the CD after each flight. With eScoring, 'Score Records' may make sense: a single sheet for each pilot to enter the score for all their flights, which can be left in a box for the CD at the end of the competition. Or retaining use of Score Cards with suitable precautions may be preferred to allow the CD quicker access to written backup if there are problems,

⁷ See <https://www.barcs.co.uk/forums/topic/10089-f5j-preparation-social-distance-scoring-system-trial/> (Don't confuse the dice-game trial with the consideration of eScoring itself).

⁸ Typical setup will be a 4G connection to the server from a smartphone and a wifi connection to a Personal Hotspot on the smartphone from the laptop.

Use of eScoring requires an adequate⁹ internet connection on the field. If no decent 4G / 3G signal is available, eScoring cannot be used at all. Most UK fields do seem to have a signal available but there may be problems with particular networks or all networks losing signal intermittently or otherwise falling over. It must make sense to have a paper record available as a backstop - so that the worst case if eScoring goes wrong is that results are delayed rather than lost. More below on getting (back) to the page on which to input a score.

3. “The QR Code system is a bit clumsy”

For each pilot, GliderScore generates a page for the input of their scores. By default, this input page is accessed by the pilot or spotter using their smartphone to read a QR code from the pilot’s Score Card or Score Record, which can be emailed to them before the competition to print out themselves. In principle, once the QR code has been scanned once, it should be possible to return to the input page without having to re-scan. But in practice, re-scanning is often necessary. The need to scan more than once also arises if the same person needs to access input pages for more than one pilot (which will be common – spotting for more than one pilot / not everyone will be in a position to use eScoring themselves.)

4. “We started 'bookmarking' our score cards so getting it back was a whole lot easier.”

Bookmarks offers a reasonable solution for confident smartphone users: an input page opens in the smartphone’s browser. Bookmark the page for entry of Pilot X’s scores once that it has been accessed and return via the browser’s book mark facility instead of re-scanning the QR code.

5. “The web page system looks good, not dissimilar to having bookmarked your card, possibly easier for some?”

Paul Robinson has been generating very smart web pages for F3K competitions which use eScoring¹⁰. These eliminate all scanning and re-scanning of QR codes: a web page for the contest has a button on it for each pilot. Just click the button to go to the page for entry of Pilot X’s scores. This is probably the most user-friendly system for pilots and spotters but web pages for the contest with links on each pilot’s button have to be set up before the contest so this does require a bit more of the CD¹¹ than the use of bookmarks – use of which doesn’t require the CD to do anything.

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⁹ Data transfer is light. No need for an outstanding signal. No-one should be running up huge mobile data bills.

¹⁰ See <http://f3k.freecluster.eu/>

¹¹ Paul’s F3K system is quite sophisticated. But the basic functionality can be achieved without scripting by putting links into any web page- e.g. <https://kentinterclub.wordpress.com/glider-2/> is a proof-of-concept page (with not all links in). Or links could be put into a forum post.