

# Christmas

# @ Empuria

For as long as I've been in the sport, UK skydivers have flocked to Empuriabrava at Christmas in search of winter sun and fun skydives. Typically, the majority of participants are British. When there are so many places in the world to visit, you have to ask why so many go back year after year.

Simple reasons and plenty of them! Empuriabrava understand what it takes to deliver a good boogie because, for them, the Christmas Boogie is where it all began. It was a chance idea for a one-off Christmas skydiving event at an airstrip in northern Spain back in 1985 that led to the start of an operation that expanded into the thriving drop zone that we know today.

These days Empuriabrava run numerous events throughout the year; wingsuit tours, CF camps, Go Vertical, canopy piloting events, competitions etc. They offer AFF training and FS progression for new skydivers and boast the resident *Babylon* team for top-notch freefly training and the Safe Flight School for canopy coaching. But it's not all about jumping; the bars, restaurants and inexpensive accommodation, plus a beach nearby for the summer, and skiing just an hour away for the winter, make it obvious why people keep coming back!

## Christmas Boogie through the years

The Christmas Boogie is the event that remains closest to the hearts of the management. Rightly so! Years ago the boogie was a small, high quality event where people participated in fantastic formation skydives that you would still be proud to be on today. Over the years it grew, with over 800 participants at its peak in 1988!

*"It was a real festival of aircraft in those days – the place to go to experience something new"* said Santi Corella (staff). *"But we quickly saw that the scale of the event risked sacrificing quality, and subsequently took steps to revert to the 'magic' of the early years"*.

## 2007 – Best ever!

Now after 21 years the complexity and standard of dives has gone through the roof. *"We have without a doubt witnessed the best Empuriabrava Christmas boogie ever – with pictures that really speak for themselves"* concluded Santi.

Ian 'Milko' Hodgkinson who just celebrated his 12<sup>th</sup> year as a load organiser at the boogie, witnessed first hand the rise in quality and, according to the DZ management, *"has been an key ingredient for success"*. Milko is one of Europe's best load organisers. Jumpers travel from far to be part of his group at the boogie, even trying to book their slots in advance. This level of commitment is what makes the kind of dives we saw at the recent boogie happen with style!

*"But without the other organisers it wouldn't have happened either"* explained Ivan Coufal (co-owner of Skydive Empuriabrava). *"Everyone has to start somewhere and there were people on Milko's group who had worked their way there over several years. It was great to see! The quality of the second and third experience level groups in the boogie has also risen dramatically. There used to be a great divide but now there are so many excellent skydivers attending"*.

It was that quality across all the groups that made the 50-way sequential formation possible. *"A two point 50-way is an awesome achievement and a sign of what's to come in the future!"* commented Milko, *"but it definitely makes my job harder! With limited slots on the highest experience group there are always people who I haven't got space for. Equally though, that is what lifts the level across the whole event"*.

If you missed out on the 2006 Christmas Boogie, why not pencil it in the diary for 2007? I, for one, am booking my slot right now!



Photos: Gustavo Cabana







# Get the most from being **ORGANISED**

## **Which group is right for me?**

Think about your goals. If you have the skills to do complex dives and are happy to stick to slots you do really well, a high-level group is probably the best. If you want to improve, choosing a mid-level group may be better as you can try different techniques in an environment where it's okay to make more mistakes. If the most important thing is having a laugh and socialising in the evenings so you might feel a bit under par in the mornings, you may be better off in a relaxed group who will appreciate your amusing antics!

Also, consider your currency. Don't throw yourself in the deep end if you know you're a bit rusty. Speak to the organiser of the group you ideally want to be in and explain that you want to warm up elsewhere first. They will appreciate your honesty!

If you're not sure, speak to the organisers, ask what is expected and watch their video debriefs. The most important thing is to be honest about your skills. Don't just go for the most experienced group because you think it's cool or the place to get the best skydives. More often than not, you learn far more in an environment where you can try different things and are not under pressure.

## **How do I get into the right group?**

Speak to the organiser, tell them what your experience level is and what you want to achieve. If there are more experienced people there who know your skills, ask them for advice, get them to help you identify the right group and even speak to the organiser on your behalf.

## **I can't get into the group I want!**

Don't despair. There is so much to learn every jump. Challenge yourself! Do slots you wouldn't normally do. Super-float, dive out last after an extra delay, go 'over the top' or even ask for a slot with more movement between points. Let the organiser of the group you think you should be in know that you are keen to move up, then relax and have some fun. You are guaranteed to make new friends skydiving and that's what a boogie is really all about.

## **What if I get axed?**

It happens to everyone at some point, there is no shame in it. We all have bad days and it is healthy for our egos to realise occasionally that we aren't quite as good as we think we are! The most important thing in this situation is attitude. Cutting someone is a tough decision for a load organiser. He or she will remember you positively if you take it on the chin, do your best to understand why it has happened and learn from it. If you make the organiser feel bad and tell everyone how unfair it is, you will not do yourself any favours and it will probably ruin your holiday.

Ask the organiser to help identify a new group for you. Ask he or she to explain what you need to work on (and how), and then use your new group to improve the skills that let you down.

## **How do I make it onto future events?**

Every event improves your skills and may be useful for new contacts. Ask your organiser if he or she will provide a reference, swap email addresses and find out about other interesting events they are organising at. Once you have solid references you have the start of a skydiving CV – something that will help to open doors for you. See next issue for how to work at that!

Caroline Hughes

[www.skydivechoreography.com](http://www.skydivechoreography.com)