Picking Thermals

An Article by Peter Brocks, which is stolen here from the November 2001 Ontario based Sam 86 Speaks (David Larkin, Editor) who in turn stole it from the August 2001 Bat Sheet (Chris Wienrich Editor)

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Picking thermals has to do with feeling the subtle changes in the environment, which, to the untrained, are not apparent. Therefore there is no simple recipe.

Tools: Mylar streamers, fast sampling thermistor devices, fluffies, bubble machines, piggybacking (on) Birds and other models.

Early Morning: (The) air is buoyant neutral, small rises in temperature (as little as 2º F), heating is thru water evaporation from air.

Midday: Strong thermals (boomers) develop that exceed the sink rate of the models, rise in temperature can be a few degrees with wind calming, wait until a cooler breeze (fill) is felt and the temperature clearly drops. Do not launch right away, especially with fast, higher climbing models, but wait 10 to 20 seconds, depending on wind velocity.

Late Afternoon: Thermals stay closer to the ground, tend to be larger size. Smaller rises in temperature (1º+F). Be patient, fly over dark areas.

Strong wind: Wait for a three or four second lull of lower wind velocity, launch immediately at an angle to the wind.

No Wind: Watch streamers to see center of building hot air column, the rising air circles counterclockwise. Wait for light air movement (indicating) fill. Be very patient as the air rises very slowly. When launching, place the model in the center of the rising air.

Cold Front: Rising air precedes the rain and the breeze. Good air is still present (even) when rain starts.

Flapping: If wind is moderate and ground surface is warm, then flapping a shirt or running or driving under the model will release rising air.

General Rules: Do not launch if there is a chance that the sun might soon come out of the clouds. Do not fly if other models are launched when a conscientious decision to launch has not been made; rather watch other models behavior. Most of the time flying a little later will give better results. Concentrate and take in your environment.