Army Drone Grand Prix: Italy Bets on UAV Pilot Training

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The 41st IMINT Regiment “Cordenons”, together with the Tactical Information Brigade, hosted the first **Army Drone Grand Prix**, a competition that saw UAV operators from various Armed Forces units compete. The initiative, which took place in the rural areas of Colle Terelle (FR), aimed to enhance the operational capabilities of remote piloted system pilots in scenarios that replicated realistic contexts.

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In the presence of Army Corps General Giovanni Gagliano and numerous unit commanders, the teams competed in two categories:

- **CAT-1 (fixed-wing systems)**: planning and execution test with UAV “Raven-C/DDL”. The Alpine Brigade “Julia” prevailed, followed by the Artillery Command and the “Aosta” Brigade.
- **CAT-2 (multirotors)**: timed obstacle course with commercial drones. First place went to an operator from the “Ariete” Brigade, followed by Folgore and Granatieri di Sardegna.

General Gagliano emphasized how such events have a concrete impact on training, enhancing operator readiness and stimulating the development of units in a strategic sector like unmanned systems.

The International Comparison

While in Italy the Drone Grand Prix is an absolute novelty, other countries have long introduced similar formats to test the capabilities and readiness of UAV operators.

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- **United States**: the US Army has organized internal competitions in recent years for drone operators from light infantry and special forces, aiming to refine tactical reconnaissance capabilities and coordination between ground and air assets. In 2023, a “drone rodeo” was held at Fort Benning, where teams competed in navigation, target identification, and electronic warfare challenges.
- **United Kingdom**: the British Army has introduced the “Drone Experimentation Group” and periodic competitions to evaluate progress in the use of small UAVs in infantry and light cavalry units. These events are often linked to multinational exercises like “Urban Warrior”, where drone use is integrated into complex urban scenarios.
- **Poland**: the Polish Armed Forces, heavily engaged in technological innovation, have been organizing UAV operator competitions for several years in collaboration with national industries and universities. The events, often open to tech start-ups, aim to stimulate the search for economical and modular solutions to counter asymmetric threats like armed commercial drones.
- **Israel**: the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), a pioneer in the use of tactical drones, regularly organizes internal competitions among reconnaissance and artillery units, with a strong focus on the integration between UAVs and precision fire systems.

Italy in Line with Global Trends

The Drone Grand Prix demonstrates how the Italian Army is also strengthening its approach to practical and competitive training. The use of drones is now an essential element of the contemporary battlefield, from tactical surveillance to fire support. Competitions of this type not only enhance technical preparation but also foster the creation of an operational culture based on rapid adaptation, as required by modern multinational military doctrines.

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With this initiative, the 41st Regiment “Cordenons” follows in the footsteps of what has already been experimented by allied and partner armies, contributing to strengthening readiness and interforce cohesion in a sector destined to play an increasingly central role.

News link: https://www.esercito.difesa.it/comunicazione/Pagine/Primo-Grand-Prix-Drone.aspx