



Fly Better, Techniques and Skills

SWISS HIKE-AND-FLY – WHAT'S THEIR SECRET?

The Swiss league has been going from strength to strength – this is why

19 January, 2026, by Tarquin Cooper

It started out as a hike-and-fly academy, a small grassroots project kicked off by the X-Alps winner Chrigel Maurer to share his knowledge to a new generation of pilots. Fast forward several years and today the Swiss hike-and-fly league is setting the bar for running academies and comps – and at a level that's very high.

At the end of last season an awards ceremony took place for the league – and the results reveal a sport that's booming. Over 250 pilots competed in a total of 12 national events from May to October. (The French Hike and Fly Championship by contrast, organised by the FFVL, brings together three events). Many of the events are well established, such as Vercofly, established in 2009 and Eigertour, now in its ninth year.

But in recent years the list has kept growing with events such as the Jura Hike-and-Fly, Engelberg Cup and the Flyback Frutigen, the “valley’s toughest adventure race”, which had its debut in 2024. One feature that will surprise no one is the name at the top of the league. The 2025 league was won by Chrigel, the veteran hike-and-fly master. In second place was the Switzerland-based Welsh pilot Idris Birch and Michael Maurer (Chrigel’s younger brother) was in third with several other names well known in the hike-and-fly scene in the top ten.



Switzerland's Hike and Fly league podium: Chrigel Maurer, Idris Birch and Michi Maurer. Romy Sweda won the women's class

Only 14% of registered pilots were female with the highest ranked, Romy Sweda, 11th overall. “She is very strong. She’s ranked 15th internationally and can compete with the men,” says Benu Senn, who is in charge of the hike-and-fly discipline at the SHV.

NEW TALENT

The Swiss have a reputation as good organisers, so we asked Benu to explain the success of the league and what they do right. He says the league was founded in 2022 to build on the foundations of the X-Alps academy, which he ran for two years after Eigertour director Michael Witschi, who took over the running from Chrigel.

Initially the idea was to run training camps. But this grew into the creation of a Swiss Cup. Benu says the goal was and remains to focus more on the “sporting value” and less on the adventure – in contrast to classic hike-and-fly races like X-Alps, X-Pyr and also Eigertour. “In the Swiss Cup it’s easier to challenge in the air and also on the ground running or hiking. It’s a really good climate for new athletes to grow up,” he adds.



Red Bull X-Alps 2025

Training and bringing on new talent is key – and oversubscribed. About 70 pilots apply to join the cadre with around 30 taken on. The league run three or four training camps for elite pilot-athletes before the season. Additionally, there are seven regional hubs around the country that organise training throughout the season. There’s also a (non-selective) female team. Funding comes via the Swiss Olympic

Association and the SHV. Pilots can join from the age of 16 although most pilots are over 25.

The Swiss league has a clear sporting ethos. It's for capable, competitive and experienced mountain pilots who can also run up several thousand vertical metres over a couple of days. "This is a very good format to compete with the best," says Benu.

As such, it's a very different approach to how the hike-and-fly scene is growing in Austria with Wanderbird, an event focused more on everyday pilots. Founded in 2023 and organised by Paul Guschlbauer, it's more about "community gatherings that bring like-minded people together". And it discourages the extreme flying ethos that can affect more elite events, encouraging participants to believe that hiking down is all part of the experience.

"There is also a good spirit in Austria with Wanderbird," says Benu. He adds that running competitions in Germany is more difficult due to regulation. "Switzerland has very good conditions for hike-and-fly – you can launch and land where you want but in Germany a lot is forbidden."

KEY LESSONS

What could other new hike-and-fly leagues learn from the Swiss? Key to the Swiss's success says Benu is its uniform structure. "It's important to have the same rules for all competitions. This also gives safety to the athletes. You know you can go to four events, for example, and everything is controlled in the same way."

Any look at the hike-and-fly race scene is not complete without mentioning the Red Bull X-Alps, which this year – for the first time – introduces a Challenger event in May: 200 pilots will be competing for wildcard entries to the main race next year. "I

think it's a good idea and a good way to challenge young athletes," adds Benu. With the first Hike-and-Fly World Championship set for 2027 and the popularity of the sport continuing to grow, it seems there is no better time to be into hike-and-fly.

swissleague.ch

This article was first published in Cross Country Issue 263



YOU MAY ALSO LIKE