



# GRAPEVINE

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## THE SERVICES REGION FLIGHT SAFETY BULLETIN

(The aim of this bulletin is to help prevent accidents, not to apportion blame)

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### POSITIVELY CONNECTED?

A Nimbus owner landed safely after an airbrake paddle opened during the tow. The control had not been connected correctly during the rig earlier that day.

*The pilot, who has been rigging the Nimbus for 15 years, has stated that he will carry out positive control checks from now on.*

Another Nimbus pilot found himself struggling to control his glider on tow. He subsequently discovered that one aileron hotelier joint was disconnected.

*At the time, this syndicate was not in the habit of carrying out positive checks.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

That in most cases, aircraft involved in mid air collisions are travelling in a similar direction?

That in many cases of glider v glider collision, both pilots had previously been aware of each other's presence but had momentarily lost track of each other's position in the thermal?

That 'competition spirit' may influence pilot decision making to such an extent that some may take risks when manoeuvring in thermals during competition flying that they would normally view as unacceptable?

That the chance of successfully abandoning a disabled glider is minimal if started below about 2500'?

That some pilots are unaware of the correct procedure for jettisoning their glider canopy, as described in the flight manual?

(Information obtained from the FAA and from BGA incident & accident reports)

## AN ARRESTING EXPERIENCE

An Astir pilot climbed off the ground 'normally' during a winch launch. Near the top of the launch, the speed reduced to 50 kts and the pilot released. An attempt to lower the nose was unsuccessful, and subsequently the pilot found that he needed full forward stick to keep the glider flying. The glider was sinking rapidly and the pilot 'arrived' in a field, stopping within 30'.

*The glider tailskid, fitted with a non-standard skid plate, had picked up the second cable during the 'all out' phase of the launch.*

## NEARLY A VERY FINAL GLIDE

During the final glide into a competition site, a number of competitors found themselves struggling through a growing rain shower. One pilot realised late that he wouldn't make the airfield and turned very late into a field. The glider departed, but was too low for a full spin to develop. The glider was seriously damaged.

*Making the decision to pick a field out on task can be a lot easier than very late on a final glide - there's often a fine line between "yes, I'm going to make it" and falling short. There is no easy answer, but having a really good look at the fields around the competition site before you need them can be a useful exercise. Even better, try to give yourself a bit of extra final glide height - there are no prizes for landing out.*

## SENIOR PILOTS

The average age on some RAFGSA launch points is sneaking upwards, with an increasing number of retiree's rediscovering the sport. The older generation have a lot to offer gliding, and many clubs would struggle to operate without their skills, advice and experience. However, everyone slows down a bit as they age and perhaps that's where problems can occur at gliding clubs used to dealing with a predominantly young population.

It appears as if pilots who start gliding after retirement are particularly at risk, probably because they have less capacity to deal with all the new situations as well as reacting a little less quickly than their younger fellow pilots. The guys who have been flying since Pontius was a pilot only have to reassess their own limitations and operate accordingly.

*So what's the point here? Value all your members and watch out for each other - even if that means some of the more senior pilots need a bit of extra supervision. That may mean that the CFI gets the difficult task of persuading an individual to limit his or her airborne activities - ideally **before** events overtake them.*

## WINCH LAUNCH ACCIDENTS

There have been a couple of very serious winch launching accidents in recent months. To quote the BGA Instructors Manual...

*"During a winch launch, the wings must do extra work to oppose the pull of the cable and enable the glider to climb. As a result, the gliders stalling speed can increase by up to 40% of the unaccelerated value. On high-powered launch equipment - depending on the gliders speed at the time - climbing too steeply can either cause the glider to stall and possibly flick into a spin, or break the weak link. On low power equipment, to step a climb can slow down or stall the engine and/or stall the glider".*

## SPARE CAPACITY

A K21 turned finals towards a busy landing area. The glider was seen to approach with 2/3 airbrake, change direction slightly, and then sink into trees and bushes in the undershoot area. The wrecked glider slid through the undergrowth and arrived on the airfield with a broken fuselage and wing. The solo pilot was shaken, but not injured.

A LAK17 completed a type conversion flight by approaching into a busy landing area. The glider 'arrived' with a high rate of descent and damaged the undercarriage. The pilot was unhurt.

A 1500 hr instructor with a trial lesson student in the front found himself having to land short because of a crowded runway. The glider struck the branches of a tree, but fortunately there was little damage and no injury.

*Low time pilots, or those trying something new, will have less spare capacity to cope than others. Even the experienced can find a crowded landing area can be the final ingredient that distracts a pilot enough for a tricky approach to become an accident. Do your club pilots clear the landing areas of gliders and vehicles quickly enough at your site?*

## WOT? NO AIRBRAKES?

A first time Ventus 2 pilot found the airbrakes jammed on finals. He landed safely.

*By gripping the airbrake lever in such a way that it was lifted up toward the horizontal, the lever jammed against the cockpit structure, and the harder the pull, the greater the effect. Clearly, the answer is to operate the airbrake lever with it pointing down.*

## LEARNING THE HARD WAY

A pilot was attempting a cross country in good soaring conditions, but got low and picked a field. At 300', the pilot sensed he was in a strong thermal and turned...

Not surprisingly, the pilot suddenly found himself in strong sink, travelling downwind. He attempted to turn back towards the field, but was now undershooting dramatically. The pilot pulled up over a fence in attempt to reach the field, but the glider struck the fence and was significantly damaged in the subsequent crash. The pilot was OK.

*It was suggested by the site CFI that there might have been an element of overconfidence shown by this 22 year old, 100-hour pilot. Senior instructors should try to watch out for overconfidence traits in all pilots, irrespective of age or experience - a quiet word over a beer has probably avoided future disaster on more than one occasion.*

## **SLOW DOWN...**

An experienced pilot climbed into a glider at the front of the launch line and struggled to adjust the rudder pedals. After a few minutes, a bystander suggested he pull the pedal adjuster instead of the cable release!

*What a plonker. But hang on, why make such a basic error? Despite the best efforts of OSTIV, a variety of gliders have assorted controls in differing positions and some even require opposite movement to get the same effect (the LS8 undercarriage is an example). In this case, the pilot had flown quite a few hours on one type of glider and then jumped into a completely different type. Reaching for the rudder pedal adjuster had become a conditioned action, but in this case, the release knob came to hand. The best advice has to be that if you're changing types, spend a few moments readjusting yourself to the control positions and movements, and in any case, look before you pull, push or press.*

## **GOOD IDEA - BUT WHAT ABOUT THE HAZARDS?**

A couple of gliders landed at another site during an abandoned cross-country. The airfield grass was about 4" long. It was decided to carry out a dual tow to retrieve the gliders at minimum cost. One glider, a type not known for its roll authority at low speed, and only equipped with a belly hook, took the short rope. As the combination roared off, the glider on the short rope ground looped, released and landed heavily. The very powerful tug and the remaining glider carried on back to base. After 'inspecting' the glider, the pilot who was left behind hired the local tug to tow him home.

Subsequent inspection of the glider back at the home airfield revealed minor tailplane and aileron hinge damage, and a bent undercarriage.

*It is rarely one thing that causes an accident, but usually a conspiracy of events that come to a head. We've all been under pressure at some time to 'get on with it', but this unfortunate incident highlights the need to carefully assess the risks before getting airborne, particularly in an unusual situation.*

**Don't be negative, but do think "what if?"**