

What the GNZ Operations Team is Talking About . . .

A summary of key items discussed at the Operations Team on-line meeting on 13 July 2021. David Moody (North), David Hirst (Central), Gavin Wills (South) and Martyn Cook (NOO).

1. Incident Reports for June-July 2021

- heavy landing in crosswind after early release from tow due to turbulence
- instructional flight - front canopy opened on aerotow - trainee able to close it
- tow pilot failed to make radio call when entering MBZ, potential traffic conflict
- aerotow cable not retracted into tug after release, cable clipped fence on final
- take-off on trial flight with tail dolly on, landed wheel up, only flight of the day

Commentary on Selected Incidents:

Launching with strong winds aloft: Locations in the lee of mountains often experience light winds on the ground but strong winds and turbulence at moderate heights. In this case the pilot launched for the second flight of the day despite the previous training flight reporting "heavy sink and turbulence". The pilot released from aerotow at about 1,300 feet AGL due to the severe turbulence, encountered heavy sink, and decided that he might not reach the into-wind runway so landed crosswind. Landing was quite hard and the undercarriage sustained minor damage. No further flights were conducted that day. The club has installed a weather station on the ridge top and is improving its methods of assessing the wind strength aloft.

Front canopy opened in flight: The front canopy opened on tow during an instructional flight after 4-5 mins on tow. The student was becoming uncoordinated (yawing from side to side) when the canopy swung open all the way. The instructor took control, released from tow and flew as slowly as possible, which allowed the student to reach out and grab the canopy to close it. The canopy was damaged and will need to be replaced. It was unclear whether the canopy had been locked properly in the first place (there was a distracting event at this stage in the pre-flight checks), or whether the student knocked the canopy lever while fiddling with the air vent. The operator is considering putting a small strip of red tape on the canopy that can be viewed from the back seat to confirm that the front canopy is shut. If the tape lines up the canopy is closed and locked, if it is not lined up then the canopy is not locked.

Aerotow cable clipped fence: The tow cable is normally retracted into the towplane after release, but was not done (by a switch) because the pilot was distracted by some uncertainty around the release height and position required. A short time later, during the pre-landing check, the tow pilot did not notice the lack of a green light (confirming retraction), possibly due to being distracted by a non-standard circuit (joining long final). A tow pilot cannot position the tug at the desired release height and location if the release height is not known before takeoff. There had been a recent change to procedures regarding release height which seems to have caused confusion. The lesson is that distractions interrupt check lists, and important actions can get missed. Human factors at play!

Take-off with tail dolly on: The pilot was reluctant to report this incident, but there are some important lessons for us all. There seems to have been some haste around getting this trial flight under way, although it was the only flight of the day. The ABCDE check was not performed, and no-one at the launch point noticed the tail dolly was on. In the circuit observers on the ground noted that the wheel was up, but the club policy is to refrain from informing the pilot by radio as this could distract the pilot and cause more problems than it solves. The pilot claimed that the undercarriage warning horn did not sound when the airbrakes were extended, but the horn functioned normally at a subsequent inspection. Club instructors have been counselled not to be distracted from standard routines when there is pressure to conduct a trial or instructional flight.

Wing drop at start of winch launch: Acknowledgement was made of the video recently posted by Tim Bromhead on this topic. Occasionally pilots don't release and the wing does come up after dragging along the ground. But it doesn't take much for the wing tip to snag, and the glider could then cartwheel and crash inverted. This is the first item in the "Eventualities" check list. The five items in this simple check list (WASOB) have each been chosen based on the number of fatal winch launch accidents in the UK, when the prescribed reaction was not made, or not made soon enough. In the world of Human Factors there is the danger of "normalisation of the extreme", whereby the real danger is no longer seen for what it is after a pilot "gets away with it" a few times.

The Ops Team discussed the recommended stick and rudder position during a winch launch. The recommendation is to keep aileron and rudder neutral, even in a cross-wind, for the simple reason that the pilot will not be able to centralise these controls quickly enough as the launch proceeds. In particular, any offset aileron would put that wing on the ground as the glider accelerated. This point needs to be added to the training material. A related point is that the wing runner must insist that the wings are balanced prior to giving all-out, otherwise the heavy wing will simply drop on the ground immediately after the runner lets it go. Note that this advice is different in the world of power flying, where aileron and rudder is often advised to offset the anticipated effect of a cross-wind.

2. Instructor Training

The Civil Aviation Authority has insisted that Gliding NZ suspends the Instructor Training Program until it has been "accepted" by the Director. As a result the program has had to be taken down from the web site. This is a temporary measure and it should be restored very soon.

The Ops Team is considering offering Instructor Training on-line discussions using GNZ's Zoom facility. The sessions would be about every six weeks, and last about 90 minutes each, depending on demand. Each session would address a particular topic in the Training Program, and be open to potential, new and existing instructors. There would be room for a candid sharing of views between new and experienced instructors. More information to follow.

The Ops Team would also like to see more candidates for the ratings of Instructor Trainer and A-Category Instructor, in order to increase the level of instructor training in NZ. The requirements and privileges associated with these ratings are outlined in the MOAP. It was recognised that the development of instructor trainers is mostly to do with "teaching people how to teach", and is somewhat removed from the actual material being taught and assessed. The intention is to seek external input from professionals as to what topics to include in a course.

Another proposal is for the Ops Team to convene a Zoom session of those with existing A-Cat and IT ratings to consider the most effective ways to "train the trainers".

There was discussion about the precise difference between the B-Cat and A-Cat ratings. It was suggested that the A-Cat rating was originally intended for those (recognised by their peers) as competent to train other instructors, but the IT rating is now available to a B-Cat instructor, so no longer a defining feature of the A-Cat. In the power world the difference is that the A-Cat is authorised to instruct at night, in multi-engine aircraft, and to teach spinning and aerobatics. Gliding has little use for the first two, and spinning and aeros are covered by separate ratings.

Martyn Cook
National Operations Officer
27 July 2021