

## **What the GNZ Operations Team is Talking About . . .**

A summary of key items discussed at the Operations Team on-line meeting on 1 November 2022. David Moody (North), David Hirst (Central), Wal Bethwaite (South) and Martyn Cook (NOO).

### **1. Incident Reports for September - October 2022**

- small ring at glider end of tow rope found to be cracked - but not discovered until end of day
- towplane door flew open during ground roll, tow pilot admitted to skipping a few checks
- near miss head-on with a power plane in a climbing attitude - with poor forward visibility
- motor glider circled over owner's house with engine running, neighbour complained to club
- near miss on a local ridge - one glider had Flarm off, other was on wrong frequency in CFZ
- tow pilot turned left when rope went slack at drop height - but glider had not released - upset
- non-standard arrival into controlled airspace while testing new ADS-B installation

### **Commentary on Selected Incident Reports**

**Near Miss #1:** A Cessna aircraft was climbing out adjacent to the airfield and passed extremely close to a glider returning from a cross-country flight. There was a discussion on the ground afterwards between all parties. The Cessna pilot admitted that he did not see the glider because he was in a climbing attitude and had no direct forward vision. He was also flying directly into the sun.

One comment from the investigation report was that the power pilot should have been weaving to clear the space into which he was flying. The Cessna 172 pilot was short of stature and did not have a good view over the rather high instrument panel. In discussion, the glider pilot realised that with the Cessna approaching directly in a climbing attitude at about 800 feet per minute, the glider would be visually stationary and difficult for the Cessna pilot to detect.

Many power planes have limited forward visibility, and there are other factors which compromise the effectiveness of the other pilot's lookout. This means that glider pilots must never assume that other pilots maintain a vigilant lookout. Also that traffic patterns near airports need to be followed.

**Near Miss #2:** This involved two gliders flying on a ridge during a gliding event. The report indicated that only four seconds elapsed between one glider seeing the other and taking evasive action, and the two paths crossing. It all happened "very quickly". While keeping a good lookout is the primary means of maintaining separation, picking up other gliders close by can be greatly helped by other aids - such as position reports and Flarm. Both these aids require aircraft to be on the same radio frequency and have their Flarm devices working. In this case one glider was not on the correct frequency (the incident happened inside a CFZ) and the other had the Flarm disabled.

**Tow Upset:** This incident involved a relatively new tow pilot with almost no gliding experience - only three glider flights. The glider pilot arranged with the tow pilot to tow lower down into the slipstream for the first 300 feet to increase the drag of the glider - to minimise the chance of a bow in the rope and an unintended back release occurring at low altitude.

At the expected release point, and in 1200 fpm of lift, the tow pilot felt the rope go slack and saw in the mirror that the glider's left wing was high - both events being consistent with a normal release. The tug commenced a left turn as per normal procedure, but the glider pilot had not yet released. Both aircraft ended up pointing steeply at the ground, but fortunately at sufficient height for recovery. The tow rope was lost.

The tow pilot reported that rear visibility from the tug is very limited, particularly if the glider moves slightly out of position to the right. This limited field of view to the right was able to be demonstrated on the ground.

The investigation report clearly identified that the major cause of the incident was the incorrect assumption by the tow pilot that the glider had released. A secondary factor was inaccurate station-keeping by the glider pilot. It is strongly recommended that every glider pilot gives 100% of their attention to flying accurately behind the tug, in a position where the tow pilot can see the glider in the mirror. We should not attempt other tasks on tow, such as retracting the wheel, fiddling with the instruments or talking on the radio. But listening on the radio could be important.

Glider pilots can assist the tow pilot by releasing with slight tension in the rope while positioned directly behind the tug. The release will then be felt by the tow pilot, who can verify the release by glancing in the mirror. And tow pilots need to be absolutely certain that the glider has released before commencing a left turn. Tow pilots who are new to gliding do need to be supported until experience has been gained about all these subtle aspects of aero-towing.

## **2. Updated Instructor Training Program**

An updated instructor training program has finally been accepted by the Civil Aviation Authority after an extended period of negotiation and refinement. An implementation plan is under preparation, with the roll-out likely to start towards the end of the current soaring season.

One of the key elements is a set of assessment standards for C, B and A-Category instructors, which was insisted upon by the CAA. The expectation is that being an instructor - or an instructor trainer - will be a privilege and an opportunity for personal growth as well as furthering pilot development.

## **3. Broaden the Scope of Club Audits**

A suggestion has been made to the Ops Team to extend the scope of club audits. At present the mandatory part of the audit typically involves just the CFI and reviews the keeping of personnel records, compliance with standard operating procedures, adequacy of aircraft maintenance and suitability of facilities and emergency plans.

The new suggestion is to broaden the functional audit into a "health check" of the club by gathering all the key people in a room (e.g. chief tow pilot, winch master, CFI, president, club captain, chief engineer, chief coach) and having them talk with each other in a structured discussion. The aim would be to develop a more rounded view of what was happening in the club as a whole. Does everyone understand each other's responsibilities? Has there been a pattern of incidents that could point to some collective action required? Are any aspects "letting the club down" and what could be done about these? Are all the leaders and senior members working together as a team?

One thread could be to look closely at risks and behaviours that could turn into incidents or accidents. For example, any excuse of "pilot error" could be probed more deeply to identify underlying causes, and there may be ways of addressing these causes - perhaps with more training, improved procedures or better management.

Another lead-in could be to review all the incident reports for the last year and see if there are any systemic weaknesses in the club environment. Are there a lot of ground handling problems? Aerotow incidents? Landing incidents? Rostered people not showing up? On the other hand, clubs that don't generate any incident reports at all might need to ask whether they are being strictly honest with themselves - we all make mistakes, after all. The key issue for aviators is that we pay attention and learn from them.

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9 November 2022