

What the GNZ Operations Team is Talking About . . .

A summary of key items discussed at the Operations Team on-line meeting on 9 May 2023.

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1. Incident Reports for April - May 2023

There have been no incident reports submitted for this period.

2. Where to Look During a Winch Launch

Recent discussion among instructors at a winch site revealed different opinions on when to look at the wing tip during a winch launch, as opposed to looking straight ahead. The club was grateful for this comment from one of its summer instructors from the UK. The text is so clear that it is reproduced in full below:

I teach the student pilot to look out at the wingtip during the rotation. Why do I do this? Because this is the only climb angle reference available and it prevents the horrendous over-rotation, close to the ground, that we have witnessed both in the UK and in NZ. As I'm sure you are all aware, a well-controlled climb angle is critical at the beginning of the launch if you want to recover from a cable break close to the ground. Looking out laterally and adjusting the climb angle mid-climb is too late in my opinion, you might be in a heap of fibreglass wreckage before then. Also, consider the visual information available ahead during the rotation; it's simply all blue (grey in UK!) and offers no pitch angle reference.

When I was flying with (one trainee pilot in particular) I encouraged them to adopt this method of judging the climb angle during the rotation and their launches improved dramatically. The previous, variable, over-rotations to 60 degrees or more were eliminated and they consistently rotated smoothly to around 45 degrees climb angle. If you're not looking out laterally during the rotation yourselves I'd encourage you to try it, and then teach it. I hope that you'll find the rotation to a safe climb angle is far easier and more consistent.

Look straight ahead during the initial phase of the launch, until all sight of the ground disappears at the start of rotation. Then eyes out to the wingtip to gauge pitch attitude. Then flick back to the ASI - and open up your peripheral vision.

3. Being Asked to Pose For a Photo

A couple of recent situations have highlighted the risks involved when attempting to fly close to another glider in order to take a photograph. These were impromptu events, not properly planned beforehand, and in one case left the pilot being photographed so distracted and overwhelmed by the closeness of the camera plane and a series of instructions over the radio about how and where to manoeuvre . . . that he momentarily lost control of his glider. If you find yourself being pressured by another pilot wishing to take photos, and you're not comfortable, then politely decline the offer.

Air-to-air photography involves close formation flying and demands a high degree of attention. Ideally the pilots involved should have had a chat on the ground prior to flight, and formulated a plan. Without experience, and the right equipment, good aerial photographs are difficult to achieve.

If the camera plane is a two-seater, and the pilot concentrates on aviating while the camera person composes the shot then that can be reasonably safe. If a longer lens is used then the aircraft do not need to be too close together, and in fact depth-of-field improves when they are not too close, which means the foreground and background can both be in focus in the photograph.

But what if the camera plane is a single seater, and the pilot is both flying and trying to compose a photo using a phone camera (typically with a wide-angle lens) at the same time? He might try to fly in close formation with only half his attention on his flying.

Bear in mind that just touching the other glider - or being touched by it - can quickly turn nasty. Control surfaces are very vulnerable to damage in a mid-air contact, and even a gentle bump can damage the other glider and render it uncontrollable in an instant. It's happened before.

There are pilots in NZ who have achieved a good grasp of taking photos from gliders. Seek their advice before trying something yourself on the spur of the moment. There are lots of issues to consider.

4. Instructor Training and Assessment to New Standard

Good progress is being made across the regions with helping existing and potential Category-A instructors become fully conversant with the new Instructor Training Program (ITP), including the assessment standards and the various tools and forms that are available to make their job easier and more effective.

It's become clear that training and development of new, younger instructors needs to be done steadily and consistently within every club. If this is not done then older instructors seeking to retire will find there is no-one ready to step up to fill their roles, and this threatens the future survival of the club.

The pressure is on to get new instructors trained and up to speed, and existing instructors upgraded. Each club needs at least one A-Cat and a clear development path for the rest of their instructors and potential instructors. That's the plan.

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