

What the GNZ Operations Team is Talking About . . .

A summary of key items discussed at the Operations Team on-line meeting on 28 January 2025. David Moody (North), David Hirst (Central), Wal Bethwaite (South) and Martyn Cook (NOO).

1. Incident Reports for December 2024 - January 2025

- rudder jammed while deflected to left, two hours into flight, pilot made a side-slipped landing
- pilot pulled on canopy release knob while adjusting air vent, held canopy in place with knees
- airspace breach on wave flight, pilot didn't know the local lower limit of controlled airspace
- tug commenced a take-off with mowing tractor on lower end of runway
- airspace breach during contest, pilot did not distinguish between spurious and genuine warnings
- airspace breach due to loss of situational awareness, not helped by nav instrument malfunction
- airspace breach on aerotow launch - tow pilot admitted to being distracted and not 'on task'
- near miss between tug climbing with glider on tow - and another glider with sustainer running
- radio calls made using wrong frequency - pilot failed to switch frequency upon entering MBZ
- dual watch radio - pilot transmitted landing intentions on wrong frequency
- dual cross-country tow - uncommanded release of both ropes at tug end during climb-out
- instructional flight - near miss with another glider while on long final approach to land
- visiting instructor - omitted to sign DI book after completing a daily inspection of glider
- access door on tow plane opened during flight - attributed to incomplete closure of catch
- air brakes came open on aerotow - pilot closed them after receiving radio call from ground
- take-off abandoned - directional control felt sloppy - attributed to cross wind and water ballast
- tow pilot released rope at 1500 feet after losing sight of the glider for the second time
- wheel-up landing - pilot tried to seek lift while very low, was overloaded when forced to land
- instructor found to have acted as P1 over several months without the appropriate medical

Further Details on Selected Incidents (extracted from the original OPS-10 reports)

1.1 Know your instruments: A few of the above incidents occurred because of a lack of familiarity with instruments in the cockpit. Some instruments have a lot of potentially-useful functions, but this can make them complex to use. In a single seater there is no co-pilot to share the workload, so the pilot must do all the work - and still fly the glider.

A classic example is using a moving-map display to alert the pilot to nearby airspace. Actually, there is not just one *airspace*, but lots of different *airspace*s. To make it worse, some of those airspaces might be open and available for use during a contest. There could be so many warning beeps that the pilot keeps dismissing them as not applicable on the day . . . and then dismisses a genuine warning for a different airspace! Or gets so sick of the beeps that all of them are ignored.

Pilots are encouraged to invest time and effort to fully understanding how their instruments work, and then configuring them so that they don't overload the pilot with information that can't be processed while airborne. The same advice applies to radios and transponders, particularly if a remote control is added to the mix. A paper airspace chart (or a chart issued specifically for a contest) is a valuable back-up.

1.2 Attention to detail: Another trend relates to diligently attending to small details. The human mind is easily distracted, and constantly resets its priorities. The proper use of a check list helps the pilot to overcome this very human tendency by forcing the pilot to complete a sequence of tasks. Provided there are no interruptions.

But this is not the end of the story. The canopy is closed, for example, but are *all* the locks *fully* closed? In the towplane incident where the access door opened in flight, the latch was closed but not seated between the detents which could prevent it from vibrating to the unlocked position.

These check lists are developed and fine-tuned based on past errors, some of which have contributed to accidents. Adhering to these procedures can reduce the risk. If it feels wrong then stop and check. One pilot abandoned a take-off for just this reason - a very wise decision!

1.3 Instructing without a valid medical: In this case the CFI identified that a pilot had booked a glider for a dual flight in which that pilot would be PIC - but did not have a current medical. The pilot was advised not to fly - but did so anyway. Further investigation showed this pilot had flown a number of flights, some of which were instructional, without a valid medical. While some instances of this nature might be put down to a little carelessness, this is clearly a case of flagrant disregard for the responsibilities we all have to each other when participating in our sport.

1.4 Potential collisions near airfields: A recent report on mid-air collisions has highlighted that the risk of a mid-air collision increases significantly near an airfield. For this reason pilots are encouraged to *avoid unexpected manoeuvres* in the circuit. What might these look like?

One example from the above list would be a tow pilot climbing out with a glider on tow . . . along the downwind leg of the circuit. Pilots joining for landing might expect to see other aircraft also joining for landing, but not climbing out along this path. Another example would be diving to start a sustainer engine on downwind, followed by a sudden pull-up, when other pilots on downwind would be expecting to see aircraft on a steady descent at a fairly constant speed.

2. BGA Change to Winch Launch Guidance

The Operations Team had been alerted to a change in the British (BGA) winch launch procedures. This was about calling a STOP in the early stages of the launch. Previous BGA (and current Gliding NZ) advice is that the winch driver should ignore all calls to stop the launch in the first part of the launch, but to keep going. This advice was based on accident statistics which showed that stopping the winch just as the glider was getting airborne had worse outcomes than allowing the launch to continue. If the wing dragged on the ground it was up to the pilot to release immediately.

The latest BGA advice is [here](#). It advises the wing runner to *stop the launch if you are resisting an up or down force at the tip*. In other words, don't give the ALL OUT until the wings are balanced. Note the word 'balanced' - as opposed to 'level'. Why stop the launch? Because *most wing drops occur immediately after the wing tip runner lets go*.

Tim Bromhead has published a [video](#) showing what can happen if the wing drops to the ground during a winch launch. This would be the most likely reason for calling a STOP. The video makes it clear that the reaction time required to recognise the wing drop, convey the signal to the winch driver, have the winch driver apply the brake and have the winch drum come to a stop would be far too long to prevent a catastrophic ground loop - if the wing tip happened to snag on the ground.

The conclusion of the Ops Team was to make no change to existing advice. Namely, make sure the wings are *balanced* before giving the all-out. Once the launch has started don't attempt to stop it. If the wing drops the pilot must release, ideally before the wing touches the ground.

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