What the GNZ Operations Team is Talking About . . .
A summary of key items discussed at the Operations Team on-line meeting on 18 November 2025. David Moody (North), Roy Innes (Auckland), David Hirst (Central), Warwick Bethwaite (Southern ROO) and Martyn Cook (NOO).

1. Incident Reports for October - November 2025

- pilot accidentally flew into a parachute drop zone before all parachutists had landed
- undercarriage damage in outlanding - thick clumps of grass triggered a ground loop
- pilot missed radio call from ATC because glider engine was running
- battery ran flat during flight after maintenance due to not being charged before flight
- experienced pilot landed glider close to caravan - risk of weather-cock in cross-wind
- rudder pedal jammed by shoe when turning onto final - unsuitable choice of footwear
- no ASI on first flight after annual inspection - pneumatic connecter not plugged in
- pilot accidentally released harness while tightening straps on pre-landing check

Further Details (extracted from original OPS-10 reports and further investigations)

1.1 First Flight After Maintenance

This month we have two instances in which problems arose on the first flight after maintenance. Some engineers advise a more thorough Daily Inspection in this case, but issues like a partly-flattened battery and ASI tubing not reconnected can still be difficult to spot. Perhaps maintenance engineers need to be more conscious that they are preparing the glider for its next flight - as well as completing the inspection.

1.2 Grabbing the Wrong Handle

"This was a local soaring flight. The incident occurred on the downwind leg. While completing pre-landing checks, during straps check, I attempted to tighten the lap straps. I inadvertently pulled the release strap instead, which caused all the straps to release. The lap and release straps are similar in appearance and positioned close together, and I did not visually confirm the strap before pulling. I was unable to refasten the harness in the circuit due to needing two hands to get them back on. I landed without the harness fastened without a problem."

Being confused between two similar 'handles' has caused many incidents and accidents in the past. There is a useful sequence which addresses this issue, using the acronym TCA:

Touch the control with your hand or fingers
Confirm by visual contact that you have the control you intended (look at the placard)
Activate - only after both the above steps

This is taught in both fixed-wing and rotary aviation, especially during critical phases like landing configuration changes, engine control adjustments, or emergency checklists. One reason for checking 'airbrakes' in the pre-landing check is to ensure you are grasping the correct lever.

2. Review of Fatal Aerotow Upset

The CAA report into the fatal accident at Bridge Pa aerodrome on 6 April 2025 has been released to Gliding NZ. The facts are fairly straight-forward: the single-seat glider oscillated laterally on the ground roll, and after it became airborne it began to oscillate above and below the tow plane. These movements became more extreme. A short time later the glider was observed to 'kite' steeply behind the tow plane**,** lifting the tow plane's tail and loading the tow rope, which then broke (as it should). At about 150 ft above the ground the glider pilot started a steeply-banked turn towards the airfield**.** During the turn the glider was seen to enter a spin, descend steeply and hit the ground hard.

The reasons why this accident occurred are puzzling. The pilot was experienced in two-seat gliders, but had not flown this single seater for many years.

Perhaps the pilot was not used to the increased control sensitivity, or how to dampen out pilot-induced oscillations. He might have convinced himself that he would soon get the glider back under control, as in, "I've got this".

Perhaps he didn't rehearse the first item in the *Eventualities* check list for aerotow: *Keep straight on the ground roll - or release!* Maybe he didn't seriously expect that he could need to release. Initially there would have been runway ahead, but it can be very hard to 'change the plan' and abandon a launch once you have committed to taking off.

Another possibility is that the pilot had no well-considered plan for when the launch did not proceed normally. Sometimes we carry on because we don't immediately recognise what is happening, or we just don't know what to do next. We may even go into 'panic' mode, and mentally freeze in fear.

The tow rope broke due to the nose-high attitude of the glider. The required response would be exactly as for a winch launch cable break: *Adopt the recovery attitude and wait for the speed to reach <approach speed>. No airbrakes or turns.* Unfortunately, a response like this for aerotow upset is not included in the aerotow *Eventualities* list - the emphasis is on avoiding upsets.

A glider can be flown with wings level at a much slower speed than in a turn - a fact that is easily overlooked when the area ahead looks unsuitable for landing. But landing in a horizontal attitude - even if crashing between trees or houses - is more survivable than landing vertically downward in a spin.

Hence the final piece of advice in the Aerotow *Eventualities* list: "If the rope breaks or the tug waves you off in the first few hundred feet after takeoff then maintain approach speed and land in the best available space in front of you. Don't try and turn back to the airfield at low level - it's too risky. Rehearse what you would do . . . during every takeoff."

3. The Danger of 'Low and Slow'

In light of several recent incidents it seems timely to remind pilots about the danger of 'low and slow'. The cruel twist is that - for someone standing on the ground - **height** seems dangerous (you might fall to the ground and hurt yourself) and **speed** also seems dangerous (you might run into something and injure yourself).

But when you are inside an aircraft in flight the exact opposite applies. This is the basis for a safe glider circuit prior to landing. The idea was expressed very lucidly all the way back in 1944 by Wolfgang Langewiesche in that amazing book, *Stick and Rudder*. Excuse the quaint writing style, and the slightly sexist language, and absorb the message:

> The one fellow who is really broke in the air is the one who is out of both altitude and speed. Low and slow is the pilot's idea of dangerous flying. Low and fast is fairly safe if you don't get to daydreaming and hit a tree, and if you don't let them catch you at it, for it is illegal. High and slow is fairly safe if you do it right and if you have trained yourself to react to a stall in such a manner that a prompt recovery will result instead of a spin. **High and fast, which your girl friend thinks must be awfully dangerous, is the safest.** Thus, if you want to keep well, you have to keep speed or altitude, or best of all, some of each.

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