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Buying the right glider

As you approach your Club Pilot (Novice) rating, you may be considering buying your first glider. Brand new or second-hand, it is vitally important to buy a wing which has airworthiness certification (described on page ??) and is suitable for your level of experience. Many of the types available have been designed for pilots with a great deal of experience or even for out-and-out competition performance, but there are also many types designed specifically to help the novice get started in his or her flying career.

Buying a suitable glider will reward you with hours of safe, predictable and pleasant flying and allow your skills to develop as you set yourself new goals. An unsuitable glider is likely to hamper your development as a pilot and may give rise to a loss of confidence and an increased risk of accident and injury. The best advice is to watch other pilots and talk to them. Learn as much as you can about what is available before making your choice. Don't allow anyone to pressurise you into taking something against your will - you are the customer! Your instructor will be able to give you advice on the type of wing best suited to your abilities, but we offer the following guidelines.

Hang gliders

A number of hang glider models have been specifically developed to meet the needs of the novice/intermediate pilot, and many of these are available either new or second-hand. These are ideal gliders for the Club Pilot (Novice).

Skyfloater types offer very easy flying qualities for beginners - and for experienced pilots who don't want or need high performance, high weight or heavy cost. Types include the Aeros Target, Off-Piste Discovery and Wills Wing Falcon.

The Intermediate heading encompasses gliders ranging from those just slightly more demanding to fly than the Skyfloater type, through to some that are a lot more exacting. Your instructor should be able to convert you on to a lower-performance intermediate during the last few days of your Club Pilot (Novice) course, but you will need to get an hour or two logged on something more forgiving before your instructor puts you onto one of the higher performance intermediates.



Intermediate: Avian Rio PHOTO: DAVID WOODTON

Less demanding intermediates include gliders such as the Moyes Sonic and Wills Wing Sport 2. Towards the more demanding end of the intermediate category come gliders such as the Avian Rio, Seedwings Spyder, Moyes XT and Wills Wing U2. You will require a little more instruction before you are ready for any of these gliders, but then again you'll probably find that their enhanced performance allows you to keep them for several seasons before wanting to explore the high performance world.

You will also find many purpose-built highperformance gliders available second-hand (some at very tempting prices). You should keep well clear of these until you have at least 25 hours experience; with some types you will need considerably more than that - some of these gliders have very demanding handling characteristics.

A few other points: It is important to buy a glider designed to carry a pilot of your weight, so check your 'clip-in' weight - yourself plus full flying clothing, boots, helmet and harness - and ensure that this matches the glider's weight range. Make sure the glider you have in mind is certificated at the size that you will need to fly; some types only have certification in one or two sizes. Always seek your instructor's advice when buying any hang glider, and never view a glider without an experienced pilot or instructor with you to check it over and conduct a test flight. Make sure that the glider you buy is supplied with a handbook and batten plan.



DHV 1/2: Ozone Buzz Z PHOTO: OZONE

Paragliders

The pages of Skywings will reveal that there are many, many types to choose from, so how should you start? The principal concern must be to get a glider that has suitable safe flying characteristics and is the right size for your weight.

The airworthiness certification (described on page 41) provides a very useful guide to a glider's safety characteristics. New Club Pilots should only consider gliders certified as AFNOR 'Standard' class or DHV 1 or CEN 2004 Class A or B. (Some DHV 1/2 gliders may also be suitable, whilst some AFNOR Standard class gliders may be less suitable.)

Size is also very important. The stability and handling of a canopy

are adversely affected by over- or under-loading. Most designs are produced in three or more sizes to suit different pilot weights; you should examine the handbook (make certain that you get one with the particular canopy you buy) and other literature to ensure that you fall within the published weight range. Weights are normally quoted as 'Total weight in flight' but check carefully. Total weight in flight means the weight of the pilot (fully dressed and booted for flying), the harness, helmet, instruments, emergency parachute equipment and the paraglider. You should also check that the harness type you intend to fly with is suitable: harnesses can have a dramatic effect on paraglider stability so it is vital that you fly with one with the same characteristics as the one your paraglider was certified with. Your instructor will advise you further on this.

When buying second-hand, you need to consider the spares and repair backup (e.g. replacement lines) and the possibility of material degradation. There are plenty of good gliders on the market, so anything you are unsure about is best avoided. Good stability and handling on an older paraglider usually means low performance, but can also mean a bargain price. However, nothing lasts forever and even a carefully treated paraglider may not last as long as 200 hours. Before buying a used canopy make sure it has been recently serviced by the manufacturer. Above all, avoid buying an advanced wing, new or second-hand, that you may think you will 'grow into'. To progress safely and surely you need a good handling, stable wing - now!

Buying a helmet

Check that the helmet carries a CE mark. The label will give the number of the standard, EN 966. (There may be prefixes such as BSEN 966 or DINEN 966 but it will always contain the EN966 element.) It will also give a set of code letters identifying the helmet category: helmets for hang gliding and paragliding are coded HPG. Such a helmet is certain to provide a very high level of protection whilst still remaining compatible with our activities.

Full face or open face style? Both have their good and bad points; in airports usage there is no clear evidence that one is always better than the other, so choose according to personal preferences. Now try several helmets on and select the one which gives you the most comfortable close fit. With it unfastened check that there is no side-to-side movement. Then, with the helmet fastened, securely attempt to pull or roll the helmet from your head. Be fairly brutal in this, especially when attempting to roll it forward off your head by lifting it at the back of your neck. Finally you should check that your vision is unimpeded and that you can swivel your head freely to look over both shoulders.

Once you have bought your helmet, do not paint it or cover it with stickers unless you are sure that these will not attack the shell. As part of EN966 a warning will be carried on the helmet if the shell is made from a material known to be adversely affected by contact with hydrocarbons, cleaning fluids, paints, transfers or other extraneous additions, so be guided by this. And look after your helmet and (especially) do not drop it as its abilities to protect you may be diminished.

Finally, at the risk of stating the obvious, remember that even the very best helmets can only provide a finite amount of protection - don't buy a new helmet and start thinking that you are Captain Invincible!



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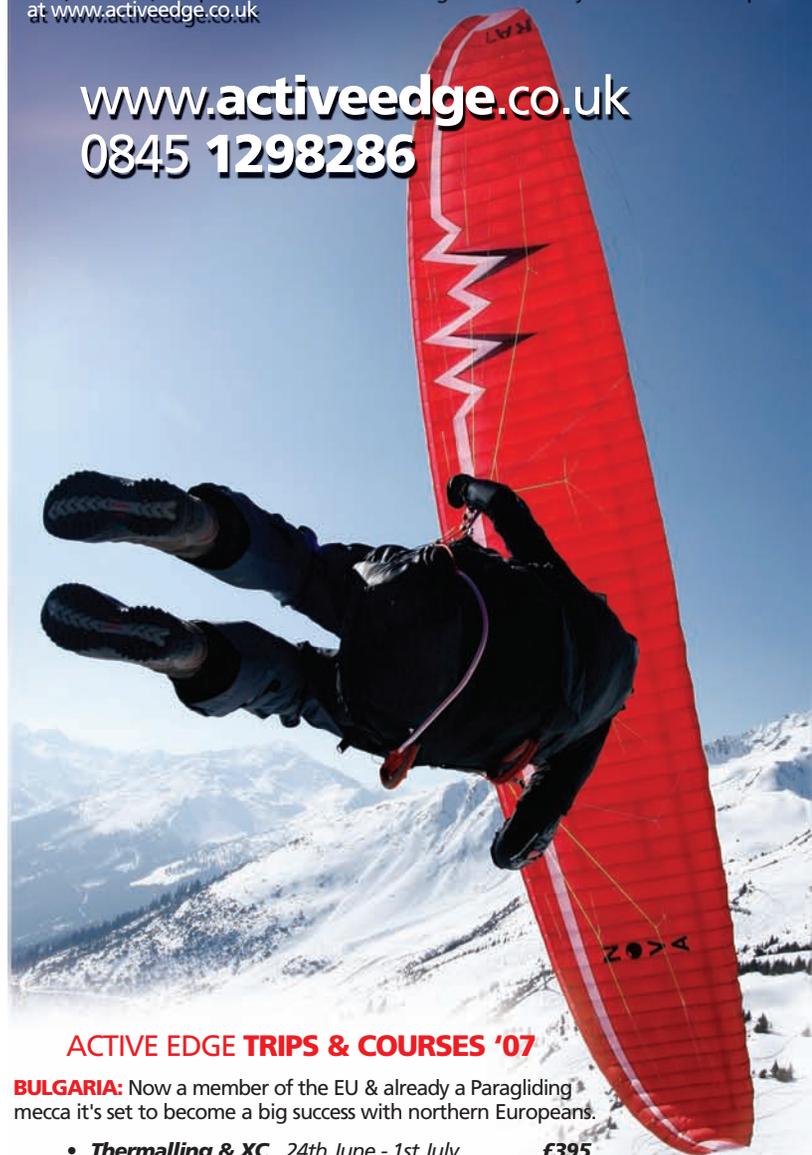
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