

To SIV or not to SIV?

Nigel Lane considers the pros and cons and learns that knowledge dispels fear

I was pondering whether to do an SIV course or not. A friend who had been on a course said it was excellent. Another, who hadn't been on one, wondered why you would want to stress your wing and lines in this way. Emergency manoeuvres are emergency manoeuvres and should be kept as such!

In the end I decided to go for it. I would at least gain more confidence in the wing and, I hoped, understand its flight characteristics better. I decided to go with Jocky Sanderson and Escape, out at Oludeniz in September.

I secured a flight to Dalaman (after losing two through the collapse of Goldtrail in July and Kiss in August – not a good omen) and flew from Manchester, arriving very early on Saturday morning. I travelled to Oludeniz in a minibus I had organised through ResortHoppa.com. The course mustered, with much trepidation, late that morning.

A check on flying hours, harness setup, insurance and the issue of buoyancy aids preceded a landing site brief. As we approached the beach my stomach started to butterfly at the number of deck chairs on the beach and people walking down the promenade. To top it all, tandem crews were flying straight down the main street and landing in the middle of everyone! However Chris White quickly eased our fears with a comprehensive brief. Thankfully our landing area was a quiet section on the eastern side of the beach.

Jocky then gave our flight brief. He explained our route with the aid of photographs, and that today we were just going to glide out to the manoeuvre area and get orientated. We were to have a good look at our lines and locate our As, Bs and stabiliser lines, etc. It sounded nice and chilled so far. Then we'd do some 90 and 180-degree turns left and right, followed by big ears then big big ears. Finally we'd do some B-line stalls and wingovers. I thought I'd never even remember it all!

In fact there was no need to worry because of Jocky's calm and reassuring voice over the radio. Before you entered the manoeuvre area he would state that he had got you in sight and re-explain the first exercise.

After the flight brief we loaded the truck for our 45-minute trip to the top of Babadag (1,969m). As you've probably read in recent articles, about a third of the track has now been paved and the toll fee, now 15TL (£7), is taken from an official-looking booth. At the summit Chris gave us a comprehensive launch site brief (the 1700m take-off is now fully paved and resembles a runway!). Chris would then time the launches so that when one person was finishing their exercises another would be entering the manoeuvre area. Around 1km of height enabled you to do up to six different exercises.

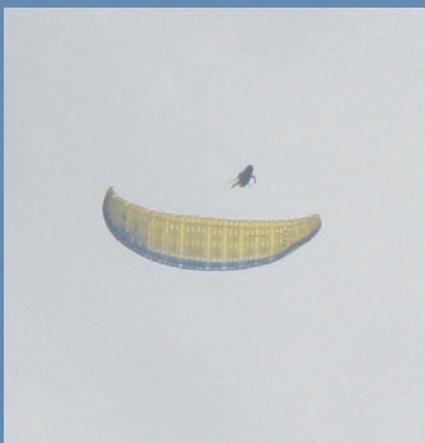
For the next two days the learning was progressive, moving from symmetric to asymmetric deflations, tight 360s to spiral dives, searching for stalls to full stalls, and always finishing with wingovers. To begin with everyone was tense about full stalls but in reality they weren't too bad. My confidence in my wing grew exponentially, to the extent that whilst doing spiral dives I found myself looking at the wing tips and subtly adjusting the brake pressure, actually enjoying the forces being exerted on me!



Loading the truck for another day's flying



The 1,700m launch at Babadag, now fully paved



Spiral dive



Asymmetric deflation

ALL PHOTOS: PETER JENKINS

On the final SIV day we had the option of our own choice of moves, and I elected to try a SAT. On the first two I panicked at (seemingly) flying backwards and dropped out after about one revolution. On the third I applied too much brake and spun the glider. Over the radio came a calm voice saying, "OK, you've spun it. Just stall out of it..." Before I knew it I was stalling and recovering it in a calm, controlled manner.

It was at that point that it suddenly hit me - before this course, if I had a largish asymmetric tuck I would have pooped myself, flown into the middle of the valley and landed. Now I had calmly induced my glider to look like a bag of washing in order to get out of a spin, recovered it, then continued doing wingovers!

One of the other students decided to test the saline content of the Med. On entering the drink, Jocky's rescue system was put into practice. Clive was out of the water in seconds and transported ashore, his wing and reserve washed, dried and repacked in time for an evening flight. This proved to me I'd chosen the right company to go with - something worth checking out if going with anyone else.

We then moved into the XC phase of the course. By now all us students had gelled together and we were having a good laugh. Chris Chandler and Clive Williams both worked in the City. At around ten hours they had the least flying time of the group, but they flew as well as everyone else. There was also Mickey Fisher from Wales, and Devi from India. English wasn't Devi's first language, but Jocky's clear instructions enabled him to participate fully in all activities. And Marcus Fishery from the south coast and Stephen Jenkins from the Isle of Man.

Our first XC flight was led by Jocky, who was thermal marking, with Chris White bringing up the rear and coaching anyone who fell out of the thermals. We all climbed to 2,800m + and flew over 20km that day in very stable conditions. From our individual landing positions we had to make our way back to Oludeniz; getting home is another part of the XC experience and enabled us to savour the ambience of Turkey and see the non-tourist areas.

I eventually got to the main road and flagged down a bus heading to Fethiye. On the bus was Jocky, Chris and my room-mate Mickey. After shifting gliders to fit around large bags of olives we settled down and arrived in Fethiye after about 25 minutes, all for about 2TL (£1).

We decided to get some lunch from a local café. I waddled out of there having sampled a spicy lentil soup followed by dishes of chicken, rice, spinach, salad and natural yogurt. We eventually arrived back at Oludeniz after having a great flight, great food and a great experience.

Normally the final flight of the course finishes at Butterfly Valley, but the weather conditions didn't allow this. However we did have another coastal flight, finishing with probably the best barbecued fish I've ever tasted.

In conclusion, I'm reminded of two experiences. Firstly, sitting on a hill in Slovenia assessing the changing conditions, I had watched as a pilot started to get cloud suck beneath a massive rapidly-developing cloud. The pilot

spiral-dived his wing and landed safely. What if I had exhausted my options and was still getting sucked up? Would I spiral dive my wing? I think I'd have given it a go, but without having experienced rapid-descent techniques in controlled conditions on the course, trying it for the first time and in anger would have left me crying like a baby, overwhelmed by the Gs you pull and the whole iffy situation. And now I also know that I need to apply a touch of outside brake in order to pull out of a spiral dive.

And a friend of mine, flying in Bulgaria, had to stall his wing to recover it from an asymmetric tuck and cravat. If I'd had to do that prior to this course I would have been absolutely terrified. I had been really shocked at the amount you seemed to fall backwards and would probably not have released the stall at the correct point, thus probably compounding the problem.

Now, after experiencing these things, I know what to expect. As the proverb states - knowledge dispels fear. I had learnt how my wing reacts in different situations, how quickly it recovers and the way it recovers. I had seen the effect of varying degrees of weight shift in these situations, and had felt the sensation of stalling and spiral dives, etc. To answer my initial question - to SIV or not to SIV? - the answer is a resounding yes.

I'd like to personally thank Jocky and Chris White for running an excellent course, and of course all the other students who made the course such fun as well.

