

# HOW TO BE A BETTER PILOT

Tim King begins a new series of articles aimed at the beginner paraglider pilot



## No 1. Glider preparation: building the wall

If you have not long left your training school, you will have learnt only the very basics of paragliding to enable you to pass out as a new Club Pilot or novice. The next stage in your flying career is often seen as the time when you are at your most vulnerable.

In this series of articles I'm going to help you build on what you already know, and introduce some new techniques which delve a little deeper into some of the fundamental building blocks of our sport. I hope that these will help set you up on a fulfilling, sometimes challenging, exciting yet safe flying adventure.

When we are learning a new skill it's very important we analyse our failures and successes. It is no good practicing the wrong technique, or not understanding why we went wrong, or simply repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Yet in this sport you will frequently see pilots with a lot of hours still struggling with the fundamentals of ground handling and launch techniques. Easy it is not, but practice does make perfect.

Imagine how great you would feel if you could arrive at your local busy flying site with stacks of confidence and ability, with the knowledge that you can launch, even in the strongest conditions, successfully and safely every time!

And imagine boarding your holiday jet to hear the pilot announce 'Good morning. We hope to take off safely today but we have a bit of a strong crosswind and I'm not that good at those. Please fasten your seat-belts and with a bit of luck we'll be off.'

It's a scary scenario, yet paraglider pilots put themselves in a similar situation to this on a regular basis - and unnecessarily - every time they go flying. So let's learn and become skilful pilots, rather than just lucky mediocre ones.

None of my instructional features is beyond any one of you. With effort, practice and patience you can become a safer and more skilful pilot, and attain maximum enjoyment from this great pastime.

I'm going to begin with some tips on glider preparation prior to inflation. Without good preparation, any success will be due more to luck rather than skill. Our goal is to achieve a symmetrical, well balanced

'wall'. Cutting corners at this stage will lead to an inflation that will not come up squarely. A perfect wall is the keystone of a successful inflation. We must be in control of the wing right from the start, so let's look at the key points:

Hands on the control lines above the pulleys as soon as we have turned to face the glider (or rear risers if the wind is very strong). This tends to be better than holding the brake handles, especially on LTF 1 wings, because we can gain a faster response from the wing and achieve more brake travel with a shorter pull.

Use a combination of your body and hands to exert pressure on the risers to begin to inflate the wing - but do not allow the trailing edge to leave the ground. Maintain your ground. Don't allow yourself to be pulled around the take-off - *you* are the boss!

Shoulders should remain parallel to the span of the wing, the wind directly onto your back with the wing perpendicular to the wind.

The leading edge of the wing should be curved so that the centre is higher than the tips and is symmetrical. If one side is higher than the other then the wind is not on your back and you



PHOTO: IAN GUNZBURG

need to move slightly in the direction of the higher side of the wing.

Your knees should be slightly bent and the lines tensioned with your body weight, leaning back slightly. Some brake is applied, but not so much that the wind gets under the trailing edge – everything should feel nicely balanced and calm.

It's important that you build the wall gradually. If you try to do it all in one go, things can start to get out of hand. Be aware that if you are practicing on a flat field, it will be different when you are on a sloping, lifty take-off area. In lifty areas, or in higher winds, it may only be necessary to use your body weight to tension the risers to build the wall, whilst your hands have the job of balancing the wing with some tension on the brakes.

If one half of the wing is really messed up but the other half is OK, we need to use the air in the inflated side and work it through the glider to inflate the scrunched-up side. We can do this by teasing the riser upwards on the inflated side, in combination with a little tension on the brake on the same side. Just lifting the riser on the inflated side will make that wing rise and rotate



The wing is slightly uneven - move across slightly to the high side

PHOTO: TIM KING



Teasing the riser and brake in stages on the 'good' side when the wall is scrunched on the other side

PHOTO: TIM KING



Almost done, just get the centre a little higher

PHOTO: TIM KING

over, so we need to hold it back with its corresponding brake.

Teasing the riser upwards and then applying the brake will push the air through the wing gradually and controllably whilst keeping the wing near the ground. Do this in several stages and be ready with the brake on the other side - when this side of the wing finally inflates we need to be in a position to arrest it and keep it from flying up.

With all these key points in place you should find yourself in a commanding, confident and balanced position.

What can go wrong? If the wing starts to get the better of you and keeps pulsing upwards and backwards, just pull the C risers enough to kill the

lift. Keep the control lines in your hands all the time, stay calm and do not rush.

Remember, don't fight the wing. The more you pull and tension it, the more force it will generate. Instead, move towards it a little to regain a balance. If you want to stop everything, run up the side of the wing towards a wing tip whilst pulling the brakes and control will be regained.

**Next month: Reverse inflation techniques.**

*Tim King is CFI of Sky Paragliding (www.skyparagliding.co.uk). An earlier version of this series of articles appeared in Skywings in 16 parts between October 2003 and June 2005. The present series has been substantially revised and updated.*