

Out in front!

I HAVE BEEN TEACHING FLYING FOR OVER 20 YEARS NOW, more than half my working life. I'm not really a Day One man, more a post-CP school. It's the passing on of knowledge that makes me happy to do this wonderful job.

PHOTO: ADRIAN TAYLOR



One of the areas I have been encouraging my students towards is pushing out in front of the hill, where the sky will not be littered with gliders and you are away from that hard surface called the ridge. Given the trouble we go to to get airtime, why not seek out quality airtime? And come to that, why do we like flying near the ridge where all the accidents happen anyway?

What I think pilots forget are those early-day top-to-bottom flights. They might just remember flying out, and as they went down encountering a brief 50ft climb. Back then, with you at EP level, it will have felt like a monster of a thermal. Your Instructor will have had kittens and insisted you correct pitch and yaw and land straight ahead. But you had, briefly, discovered the joy of flying out in front. Soon you have forgotten that early experience and locked yourself into ridge-soaring mode.

So what to look out for? More often than not, the better days for playing out front are when it's good for a forward launch. And if the thermals are out front and I am waiting in a forward-launch position, I can scan the air and launch when I need to - with speed!

When you reverse launch, the glider pitches forwards and you brake it. This takes energy out of the wing. And then you run, with the glider probably sitting behind you, putting in way too much work. Meanwhile I am already in the air, at max speed, covering the k's!

So when the wind is light, rather than sit around and chat about whether a red glider is faster than a green one, or does my bum look big in a pod?... do a forward launch practice and make a flight out in front.

Often I just fly out and see how far I can glide; maybe to see if a certain field is good for landing in for future reference. Then I know I can glide to areas other than the bottom-landing field - I've already checked them out. This is all part of the fine art of flying out in front.

There are other aspects to understand too. If the wind is stronger and you are only covering the ground slowly, ask yourself if it is safe to 360. Usually you'll just end up back where you started from, having drifted downwind. It may be that some 90-degree turns or S-turns are enough, and you can move forwards again.

There is of course always the worry: Oh no! I am away from the ridge! What happens if I go down? Try and replace your anxiety with a flexible mindset. As your flights progress, try to go a little further each time you push out from the ridge. See how far you can glide and still get back to the ridge. Simply concentrating on this for the whole flight is a good exercise!

Try everything to make your flight more efficient. Perhaps try quarter-bar as you fly away from the hill. If you enter an area of lift, come off the bar and brake a little to gobble up the lift. As you get to feel these areas you'll begin to realise how useful the bar is.

These are the key things to remember...

- Think 'out in front'. If the wind is light you can glide a long way.
- If over a flat field you can 360, perhaps even when down to 200ft - but allow for the drift.
- Use the speed bar to get there at your best glide.
- Use the energy of the forward launch - the wing is already flying fast as you leave the ground.

- Forget about switching on cameras, setting QFE or running back to the car for batteries - you'll always miss the moment.
- Mental preparation is a must - goals are achieved when you set them in advance.
- There's no advantage in sitting on a hill chatting - be focused, like a boxer before a fight.

Even in the UK, some thermals can be just about right for you. Don't get obsessed by planning - just keep an eye on the weather. Don't look at the 'thermal-meter' websites and Facebook this and that - try predicting it yourself. And it's your home ground - you can visit it whenever you like.

Stay focused and prepared, and avoid negative conversations on the hill. You might surprise yourself. But the most important thing is to stay safe. The second is to have a good time with your friends. In time you will learn to be skilled, not just lucky.

Before you know it, other pilots will be moaning that there are too many gliders out in front and hardly any on the ridge!

More of Rob's tutorials can be found at www.freeflightbrighton.co.uk.