

after eight
years

Back in the saddle

GREG HUNT RETURNS TO THE AIR – THANKS TO MODERN
SCIENCE, DETERMINATION AND TEAM-WORK



MANY YEARS AGO I WAS ONE OF THE BOLLINGTON PARAGLIDING CLUB GROUP WHO ATTENDED STEVE VARDEN'S FIRST DISABILITY AWARENESS WEEKEND IN THE LAKES. We had brought our winch up to try to assess the future possibilities of winch launching; it was very windy and I got volunteered as the wind dummy to demonstrate winching.

The course involved us fully able bodied people having to simulate various disabilities. Steve's point was that a person with a disability is a person with a disability, *not* a 'disabled person'. For 20 years that mantra stayed with me and inspired me to be patient. It is not just a term of political correctness; watching Steve fly his hang glider off Latrigg emphasised his point indelibly.

In 2007 I had a minor snowboarding tumble resulting in a stroke, technically a Cerebral Vascular Accident (CVA). Several other minor strokes followed. Severe vertigo (a lack of balance, not fear of heights) and other stroke consequences abruptly ended my 17 years of tow and hill paragliding. Until 2007 I had never been ill or injured, despite paragliding on the hills since 1991 (using a towing canopy). Few people on the Pennine and Derbyshire hills would know me as I tended to just arrive, take off and fly as many hours as possible.

In 2010 I developed Cervical Dystonia, a condition few will have heard of. In my case my head became locked backward - ceilings are actually not that interesting! With regular Botox injections I can now move my head, but only effectively for a few weeks between treatments. After eight years of slow recovery, on Sunday April 12th I had my first tow flight since my snowboarding incident, at Barton Airfield - now called City Airport - near Manchester's Trafford Centre.

The Bollington Paragliding Club was established 1973. It has always been an aberrant paragliding school as it is run by the members and all training is free. Members pay a small annual fee and a small flight fee. This has caused a little concern from other commercial clubs, but in fact many of the club's airfield parascenders have gone on to be hill trained at commercial schools.



Photo: Greg Hunt

Land Rover tow vehicle and Bollington Club crew (L - R): tensio reader Darren Morris, driver Vinod Vettasser, Dave McManamon, Les Morris, John Beswick, Mark Hobson and Justin Farrington.

Photo: Greg Hunt

Bollington PC exists because we love to fly and to introduce as many others to our sport as possible. The club usually only operates towing between 06.30 and 08.00, before Barton's aeroplanes wake up. After breakfast - many of the members then go hill flying - there aren't many thermals at 7am! In summer, we also fly in the evenings until night after the aeroplanes have gone to bed. By the way: apologies - but Bollington PC has a long membership waiting list!

This team effort is what makes a towing operation so entirely different from the individual/independent approach when hill flying. The minimum (vehicle) towing team



Photo: Sheila Hunt

Greg Hunt raring to go; behind is Barton's original 1930 Grade 2 listed hangar

requires a driver, a tensiometer reader (who reads out loud the hydraulic pressure indicating towline tension), a launch marshal to swing a signalling bat, two wing tippers for square or round canopies or a centre for a high-aspect hill canopy. Whether the pilot is a student or has 30 years experience, whether the wind is nil or over 15 knots, the team must work safely together. Again, this trust in, and reliance on, each other to launch safely is what makes parascenders such a close-knit group.

Due to that team/group friendship I am now back in the saddle. I wish to share my thanks to the instructors and members who have encouraged, and eventually enabled, me to resume flying. Especially CFI Glenn Stockton for holding his breath for three minutes, and Mark Hobson for a very smooth tow job.

Don't be scared, hill fliers, I am not (yet) ready for that - but I may be one day when I can actually lift a canopy (I need to resume driving first). Lightning can strike twice - don't waste time standing around chatting on the hill. Fly - but safely!

To learn a little more about the history and development of our club and the sport go to www.bollingtonpc.org.uk/history.html

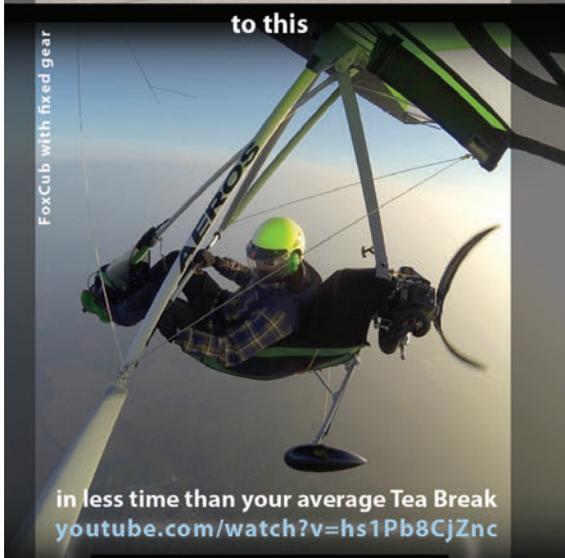
To see a typical launch/flight, search YouTube for Paragliding at Barton.



Evening flying - M60 Barton high-level Bridge in distance, David McManamon looks on



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