

ABCD? SIV? - Glider Ratings And SIV Training
Nigel Page - www.50k-or-bust.com

There are pilots who feel that paragliding is simply dangerous, do it because they enjoy danger, and have no real interest in safety. If you are one of those read no further.

Unlike me, you may be a gifted or natural pilot and able to bypass some of the learning processes the rest of us have to go through in order to fly reasonably safely. That's fine. This article is aimed at pilots of average ability. It cannot, and is not intended to be, absolutely accurate. It is a very rough personal view of things as they stand at the time of writing. Pilots seeking advice for choosing wings should consult a number of sources and, most importantly, be very sceptical. (Yes. Be sceptical of this article!) This article does not cover competition class or “2 liner” gliders.

If we look at paragliding in the 1990's there were, similar to today, beginners, intermediate and advanced paragliders. Beginners wings were very solid but did not “go” so well and advanced wings “went” well but collapsed a lot. Pilots flying “beginners” wings did not have many significant collapses but those on “advanced” wings often did, with those on “intermediate” wings somewhere between. All this meant that most pilots were well aware of the problems of collapses. Even if they were not having collapses themselves they would observe others having collapses and discuss them. In this period methods for helping to prevent collapses and deal with them (pilotage, active flying, SIV) were developed.

By comparison, modern paragliders all “go” very well and a newly qualified pilot can expect to soar on an EN A or B wing with little difficulty in straightforward conditions. All classes of wing are much more robust in turbulence and collapses are rare. Because of this, compared to the 1990s, pilots do not experience or witness collapses very often. This has led to much misunderstanding of test ratings and their limitations. EN tests and ratings do not define how easily a glider collapses, they only define what happens when a collapse occurs. My feeling is that many pilots learning today do not have an appreciation of the effects of collapses, particularly the sheer violence and amount of rotation which can occur when an EN C or D glider collapses.

One pilot recently told me he was considering a “mild” EN C wing. On questioning he said the wing “only had one category of fail putting it into the “C” rating” (otherwise it would have been given a “B”). The category in which it failed turned out to be the rotation after an asymmetric collapse. I feel this is probably the most important category. Many accidents occur close to the hill when an asymmetric collapse makes the glider rotate and crash into the

hill. I do not consider such gliders to be “mild”.

So, my basic advice is:

When “moving up” to a higher EN rating of glider move up one grade at a time. In this context EN B gliders should be considered as having two or three grades. “Low end”, “Mid”, and “High End”.

Do at least 100 hours flying on “B” wings before considering moving to “C” wings and do some pilotage and SIV training in that period. When choosing a school to do pilotage or SIV training choose one which will adapt and guide the exercises according to your ability rather than expect them to get you through specific exercises.

When moving from “B” to “C” or “C” to “D” wings do some SIV on the category you are moving to.

Modern EN B gliders are very good indeed and will give most of us the best flying we are likely to be able to experience with good passive protection.

Copyright © - Nigel Page - September 2018 – nigel@50k-or-bust.com