

## DON'T GET PINNED!!

After 2 months without even a top-to-bottom, Ra -my girlfriend- and I arrived at the Devil's Dyke on Sunday 24 April at around 11 AM, and man it was cold!! There were about 10 hang gliders already rigged, and I walked around and said hello to the guys before heading to the Pub to get some warm coffee before getting the glider off the car and ready. The day was forecasted to be windy all day so I was not in a hurry to fly, and after the 2 hour trip from Oxford coffee was good indeed. I finished my flat white, and while Ra stayed in the pub reading and enjoying her coffee, I got out, took the glider down from the roof rack, and even though everybody was rigged in the front field, I moved to the paddock because it will make for an easier launch in a northerly wind.

I started rigging up the glider, and halfway through, I stopped to help Maciej carry his glider over the fence to the paddock. He'd got himself trapped between a lot of other gliders, and despite being ready to go, he couldn't pass through to the front. 5 minutes later he was airborne, with a confident, smooth launch. He kept flying and flying for more than 4 hours... this guy's impressive!

I got back to rigging my glider, and before I got in the harness, I listened to Chris T. site briefing for Dom. I'd flown several times here before, but when you are a rookie pilot it's always good to refresh what traps are out there waiting for you! I was just getting ready when Luke N. landed besides me, reporting glacial temperatures up there!



He kindly helped me get to the launch, and advised to turn left and try to find some lift in the bowl and beyond, where the northerly winds will be more active. Once at launch, it took me some minutes to get in the right mind state after the 2 month break. I stood there, with the glider on my shoulders, feeling the wind, getting the nose up and down and getting the glider feedback; reviewing in my mind all the steps I

needed to go through for a successful take off. During that time, Luisa came to ask if I needed help, and she warned: "Be careful... don't get pinned!! Don't go behind the ridge edge with today's wind. With your glider, you may not be able to penetrate back!" I'd been flying in strong conditions before, and I never got the feeling that I couldn't advance... how could that happen to me and my super hot flying machine<sup>(1)</sup>??

Look straight to the front, level your wings, nose down, step, step, run, run, RUN!!

Once clear of the hill, I got on the base bar, legs into the harness, and started soaring...easy! I was soon high enough to attempt crossing the power lines to the left of the bowl (my biggest fear!) I had another beat to gain a few more meters, and then crossed well above the power lines. Done!!

However, I was so focused on being high enough over the cables that I didn't realise how far back behind the edge of the ridge I was. I turned towards the ridge edge and pulled in trying to penetrate the strong wind. Too late!! My super flying machine was just coming down vertically over the same spot, and all the height I had was rapidly gone so I had to get my landing gear out and gently (and unintentionally) top landed. Wind was really strong... I quickly got the nose wires, stepped over the base bar and not without difficulties, managed to unclip myself and laid the glider flat on the ground. I removed the tension to



prevent the glider from being lifted by a gust, took off the helmet, got out of the harness, and walked to the ridge edge to assess the conditions. Wind was really strong and gusty here, stronger than when I launched. I was standing in front of a small bowl, steep slopes, and it didn't feel safe to take off again from there on my own. I looked back at the Dyke's pub, and thought that I should have brought my kayak trolley -the one I usually take to Bo Peep. It'd make the walk a bit easier.

While I was making up my mind about de-rigging, I saw Luke taking off from the Dyke paddock, and flying fast<sup>(2)</sup> towards my position. The next I heard was "Yeeeeehaaaaw" and Luke landing besides my glider. He'd come to rescue me!!

He walked his glider to the edge. The wind was still strong and gusty, and he wanted to try if it was safe for me to launch from there. He took off, soared a bit around there, and then landed again and parked his glider. We went to the edge together, and he explained the conditions: quite steep slopes, gusty air, a small bowl where you don't want to get trapped... but something I could (easily) do! It was a bit like a cliff launch; wait for the low wind cycle, level the wings, say "release!" and run as fast as possible without waiting!

Looking back now, I should have been nervous at that point. But Luke managed to make it look easy, and with all I had in my head, I couldn't afford it! I got back in the harness, helmet on, shouldered the glider and walked / flew to the edge with Luke. We waited until the wind dropped, but I was still not prepared. The wind picked up again, Luke reviewed again my flying plan from launch, across the bowl without getting into it, and then wait for him soaring the north facing ridge. He would take me then all the way to Truleigh and back.

And then the wind dropped, I felt the glider balanced, I shouted "release!" and run! A gust pushed me into the shallow bowl, that was scary! But I pulled in speed and turned outwards, getting to the safe ridge as planned. I waited for Luke there, soaring up and down and gaining quite some height fast. When the wind dropped again, Luke launched and we flew

together to Truleigh. It was amazing!! I agree with what he told me before I launched: I'll never forget this flight!



When we arrived back to the Dyke Luke went straight to the top landing to recover from the cold he suffered during his first flight -interrupted by my rescue mission!. I tried to soar a little bit more, but at some point I couldn't find any lift, and I decided to go down to the bottom field and land there where I found Tony landing at the same time. I was expecting my first top landing at the Dyke as a perfect end for my first micro-xc adventure, but I had to live with a less than perfect bottom landing. Something else to add to my practice list!

I helped Tony walk his glider to the de-rigging area, and called Ra who was chatting with Luisa and Luke on the hill to see if she could drive the van down to pick us up. When we finished de-rigging she was already there waiting for us, and we drove up again, heading directly to the pub for a late lunch. I really like having a Pub within 50 m of take off!

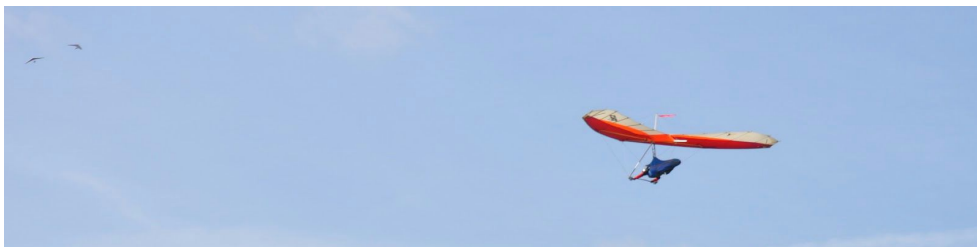
In a little debriefing sitting outside the pub, Luke told me that I'd been still flying too close to the ridge edge, and that in windy days you find the best lift a bit further out, plus you don't risk being pinned. But this has been my best flight to date, and it still puts a big grin on my face

every time I remember it!

PS: Thanks again to Luke for all the help, the coaching and the rescuing! You really do A LOT for the sport, inspiring, encouraging and supporting new pilots to become better. Thanks!

Thanks to Luisa for the good advice... now I know what "getting pinned" means!

Also thanks a lot to Ra for all the photos, the retrieve from the bottom field, and for putting up with the early morning trips to the south on weekends!



- (1) I fly a Thalhofers Joker (<http://www.delta-club-82.com/bible/270-hang-glider-joker.htm>)  
Not the super hot flying machine I thought it was... more like the Diesel version of hang gliders!
- (2) Luke flies a Moyes LiteSpeed RX 3.5... like the McLaren of hang gliders!!