

An alternative slant on flying again after a break

This may be of interest and use to any pilots especially the lower airtime pilots who have had a break from flying due to the winter or any other reason. Skywings always sends out messages about beware of spring thermals, but this is about the psychology involved.

I have just had my first flight on my Hang Glider for 21 months, but on the basis that I've been flying them since the 1970's that should not be a problem should it? Well in fact it is. I had dropped off my Hang Gliding and focussed on flying the Paraglider XC and in competitions for the last couple of years, but this resulted in my last few flights leaving me physically exhausted and nervous, mostly from overcorrecting every little movement. To top it I had a really bad experience top landing the Mynd, nearly stalling after dropping out of prone when flying at speed and ending up the wrong side of the road lucky to be walking away.

So I wanted a nice Long Mynd day when soaring would be relatively easy, with plenty of time to prepare for top landing and not too much turbulence.

Sunday looked good so I unearthed the odd thing that's been in the garage for ages, and off I went. Mark Leavesley said it had been terribly rough earlier and no HG pilots were flying but everyone was ready awaiting the wind to ease as forecast. Eventually pilots flew and some landed and said it was good. I had to make my mind up and by then was 100% sure that the conditions were good so I just had to go and do it. I made sure that I had an experienced nose wire man, and I explained my situation and he was very good at talking me through the flight and how to avoid the overcorrecting (slow down).

Oh that feeling of running off the hill – how wonderful can it get. I was surprisingly calm in the air, concentrating on not doing too much with control inputs and got up above take off easily and flew around, eventually doing the north and south ends and coming back for a good top landing making sure that I was not too fast (as the older topless gliders convert speed to height very easily but have to be controlled accurately). That nice touch down landing was superb so I just had to go again. The wind had started to drop so I just ran to the front and launched. This time it was almost scratchy and I had to work to get enough height to top land before dark, so had to do a quite low approach for another good top landing.

Following these flights I feel as elated as I've done when doing a big XC – it's because I had a big hurdle to cross and I achieved it. I'm not out of the woods yet, and I know that to become competent and confident in the air will take a number of flights in progressively more difficult conditions, but I now feel I have started the engine again.

So to anyone like me who has that barrier to climb – the mental impact of not flying for a while, these are my suggestions;

- 1) Follow the weather forecasts closely so that you can prepare in the days beforehand to expect to fly. This will reinforce the intention that you will fly rather than will not.
- 2) Choose a day when the conditions are going to be good for you. That means a site that you are familiar with, with the wind speeds suitable for soaring and turbulence to be significantly less than you are used to. Don't wait for a day when it looks like being good all day – you probably only need an hour of good conditions to do what you need to do. So look for a day when the wind is actually due to change up or down during the day, then you can time your launch exactly when you feel it is right for you.
- 3) Check and prepare your equipment beforehand. Make sure that it will not be a reason to not fly or give you any additional concerns on the day.
- 4) Once at the site, keep away from the ne'er do wells – those pilots who can moan about the conditions all day and virtually never fly – they will be the same even when it is perfect. Either keep yourself to yourself, or much, much better go and talk to a number of pilots and see what they think of the conditions and assess against their level of experience / competence. Use that not as a decision making signal, but to back up your own analysis – this is critical – you have to fly and it has to be you that makes the decision – this may have a big impact once in the air, to keep you calm and functioning in a controlled manner.
- 5) Once the decision to fly is made, quietly get ready, don't go chatting to people but focus on the job in hand. Your pre-flight checks are another important thing to avoid any nagging doubts once in the air.
- 6) Have a plan. Be it as simple as "I'll try to soar but if I have to scratch I'll go straight down to bottom land" that takes away the pressure of having to do something that the conditions might make difficult unless you are very current.
- 7) Don't fly for too long and stick to your plan. If you do that, you can simply go back to the front and fly again if the conditions are still ok. This will reinforce your positive experience.

I hope that this may help you. If you really want to, then the feeling afterwards will be worth it. It is for me.

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