

From the home of the *Scottish Gliding Union*

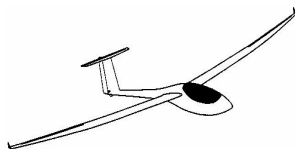
Portmoak Press

Editorial – Ian Easson

Issue 32 already, so that means we are out of summer and probably into winter without going anywhere near autumn!

I was at the club at the end of September and it felt very definitely like winter. Some of our pundits who had been in wave at 10,000 ft were reporting minus 15 degrees – brrrr!

Just as we go to press with this issue, I am awaiting notification of the ISBN which will be used to reference my book which is now well and truly completed and ready for printing. Derek Piggott very kindly sent me the foreword a few weeks ago and even the dust-jacket has been designed so I am hoping to have copies available ahead of Christmas. Cost will be £12 with all proceeds going to the club.



In this issue we hear from Peter Clayton about his experiences with the K8 syndicate and John Galloway fresh from his third place in the 2008 Regional competition at Lasham.

Finally, the usual plea to all members, new or old, experienced or ab initio, regular contributors or not, to consider submitting material for *Portmoak Press*. Details of how to do this can be found below.

Cut off dates are as follows: end of December for January, end of March for April, end of June for July and end of September for October. Material can be sent to me either typed or hand-written and dropped in my mailbox beside the payphone, or e-mail me at ian.easson@btinternet.com

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Board Members check

Chairman	John Williams
Vice-Chairman & Winch	Douglas Tait
Treasurer	Kevin Hook
Technical & W.O.A.	Joe Fisher
Membership Communications	Alan Boyle
Club Secretary	Alec Stevenson
Buildings & Property	Mike Cartney



Club News

Cross-Country Week

All in all, the course was deemed a success albeit the weather played its part in trying to prevent decent cross-country tasks.

Visit Scotland (Scottish Tourist Board)

As expected, we received a visit from an inspector at the end of September. He enjoyed an air-experience flight with Tony Brown and after his flight I showed him around the hangars and clubhouse. I asked him what sort of thing he was looking for in order to justify any star-rating. His main interest is around the impressions that a member of the public (as opposed to a club member, or even another GC member) gets in and around the club house. Surprisingly, the “experience” of gliding is almost a secondary item. He paid particular attention to the catering and toilet facilities and was very impressed with the general cleanliness and the high quality of the food and refreshments available. He even spied a “good selection” of Single Malts – although that was without his “official” hat on. He then wanted to know how a member of the public could get information about our gliding and catering facilities. He was impressed with the front of house concept and how Irene deals with the enquiries and visitors. He offered some constructive criticism around the notice-boards in the entrance lobby and the signage at the entrance to the site. I explained that we had already identified some areas of improvement in this area (see next item). All in all, he was very impressed and would be making a recommendation to the Visit Scotland team. How many stars will we get? Watch this space, or the notice-board, for more info.

Ian Easson

Clubhouse Entry Lobby

In coincidence with the Visit Scotland item, Gerry Marshal and Vic Leitch are looking to re-vamp the history photo display board in the entrance lobby. There will be a number of changes to the notice boards and exhibits and Gerry and Vic are on the lookout for new and up-to-date

material – so open up those old photo boxes and see what you can find.

Some months ago, I suggested that we were on the lookout for a digital photo frame so that we could have a continuous display of photos to interest casual visitors to the club. Unfortunately I was not inundated with offers of help and/or donations of digital photo frames. This is still under consideration and here is a chance for someone to put something back into the club by way of donating one of these inexpensive devices. Due to the lack of responses (so far), I am now looking for an alternative donation of any old (working) windows-based PC so that we can run a continuous slide-show on it. Whichever device we settle for would have the display screen visible in the lobby but with the PC access safely locked away in the office.

Ian Easson.

Club Website

Our club website has a new web-master. Vic Leitch is our man and he is on the lookout for items of interest as well as suggestions for improvements. Check out the site and let Vic know what you think <http://www.scottishglidingcentre.co.uk>

K8 Syndicate – DRV

The K8 is very easy to fly and (as far as we can tell) has vice-less handling. It stalls at about 25 knots indicated, does not drop a wing in the stall, can thermal turn very tightly at about 30 knots indicated (good for narrow Scottish thermals) and, as a result, can often out thermal the plastic, can often stay up on the hill in light breezes when the plastic can't, can land in very small fields if necessary (luckily as cross country flights can be hard work!), is nicely aerobatic (loops, chandelles), sideslips very well (especially with full airbrake), is easy to rig and de-rig, it is very cheap to buy and operate, etc, etc. So what disadvantages does this paragon of virtue have to own up to? It has to be admitted that

penetration into wind is a problem! At anything over 60 knots the nose is pointing down rather too



much and the ground comes up rather fast. The seating position is very upright and after a couple of hours all feeling is lost in the pilot's nether regions – so a silver duration 5 hour flight is a bit of a struggle. That's about it.

The DRV syndicate was formed at Portmoak in 2001, at the instigation of Chris Robinson, with the intention of providing cheap flying for young early solo pilots. It never really did this, but rather provided great fun for the more mature pilot – including currently 2 very capable octogenarians. Since formation it has completed at least three silver distance cross country flights – including one by Bill Grieve of over 130 km from Feshie to near Macduff on the Moray Firth, three gold height climbs – including one by Derek Storey where he went on to complete silver distance. In fact all three gold height flights (the others were by Les Ladomery and Peter Benbow) were still climbing rapidly as 12,000 feet approached and had to be stopped at this height as no oxygen was fitted, so we installed oxygen and since then no one has been over 10,000 feet!

So how does it fly? The controls are very light and responsive. The glider takes off quickly on a winch launch (especially if there is any wind) and the stick then needs to be moved forward a little immediately after take off to prevent the nose rising too much, the launch is then flown at about 55 knots. Aerotows are easy, again the take off is very rapid and the nose has to be held down with full forward trim on the tow. Best glide is about 40 knots and min sink 35 knots. The landing approach speed is between 45 and 50 knots depending on wind, but great care has to be taken in medium to strong winds not to get too far downwind on the approach – indeed in a strong Portmoak breeze it is better not to go further downwind than the boundary hedge! There is no wheel brake, but by putting the stick forward on the ground run the nose skid is pushed onto the ground and the glider stops very quickly.

So that's it. Why don't more pilots fly K8s? The SGU sold off their K8, CTZ, because members were just not flying it – they don't know what they are missing!

Peter Clayton



How I Didn't Do It (but maybe You could)

Your editor kindly asked me to write about the 2008 Lasham Regionals in which I finished in third place in the Sports class in 18m Discus 2cT "797". My first reaction was that it is a sad reflection on our thermal racing skills at Portmoak if a Regionals third place is worthy of an article but then I thought that perhaps that observation is in itself worthy of consideration. I will give some subjective impressions about the contest days to set the context for what follows.

I was quite surprised to have a 140 point lead after the first day because I had been unable to get enough height to glide round the final check point and ended up circling on the downwind leg of the Lasham circuit until I gained enough height to set out on a mini out and return up and down the 8km final leg. I wonder how often a race has been won by someone who crossed the finish line in the reverse direction before coming back some time later in the correct direction?

Day 2 was a low points distance day with Brian Scougall, also flying a Discus 2cT, just reaching the first TP for second place and me running out of ideas much earlier.

Day 3 was reasonably good but short 148k task with Brian winning the day and myself third. We had flown the first two legs together and then separated with Brian making better route decisions on the last two legs.

So, after the first three contest days Brian and I had each won one day and been placed on another. Having accumulated six bottles of prize wine between us we had got used to not having to buy any for our dinner and we were amused to find ourselves, for one night, in first and second places overall!

The forecast for the fourth contest day was excellent but the day turned out to be weak and overcast.

Having not taken a good opportunity to make an early start I was surprised by a rain shower and ended up struggling to stay up and drifting with a gaggle downwind from Lasham with no

sign of lift in the start area. The only option was to land and accept a relight before I drifted out of range of the airfield. I found myself at the back of a mini-grid of thirteen relighting gliders mostly from the other task group and it was 14:51 before I could start the 300k task. I had clearly lost any chance of retaining the contest lead and felt that I had no chance of completing the task. Rather than trying to race on my own, I plodded along for distance not expecting to reach even the first upwind turnpoint. To my surprise I ended up as the last glider airborne at almost 19:00 hours and needing just one small climb to get on to a final glide. Fortunately there was one remaining active cumulus in that part of the country and it was not too far off track.

Unfortunately, however, it was drifting towards the Solent Class D airspace which had a base of 2,500 feet QNH and as I arrived under the cloud my SeeYou Mobile alarm went off saying that I was 49 feet under the airspace. There wasn't enough altitude clearance to risk even one turn and I had to glide on and I started the turbo engine 17km from Lasham. I was the farthest non-finisher and placed seventh, but that misjudgement at the start left insufficient soaring time for the task and that cost me about 200 points. I dropped to third place overall with only a narrow lead over fourth.

Our fifth, and last, contest day was on the Saturday and turned out to have the best conditions of the week with a 350k task being set. I was too far off the lead to regain it on a racing day (when the points spread tends to be smaller) and I flew to protect third place rather than to chase the leader. I was placed sixth that day.

On the final Sunday we wakened to torrential rain that carried on until mid morning. Brian wisely hitched up and headed for home but I felt I had to see it through to the bitter end. We gridded after the rain stopped but I wasn't too unhappy (i.e. mightily relieved) when the day was finally scrubbed in the mid afternoon.

So what is the point in recounting this? The clues are all there. In spite of the first day success I never thought for a moment that I would win the whole

contest. I was very lucky to retain the lead over the second and third days because no single challenger scored consistently. On the fourth contest day I made a costly and basic error in not recognising that conditions dictated an early start. On the fifth contest day I was not flying flat out. Lastly, I was not expecting to retain third place if there was a difficult sixth contest day.

This is not an example of the competitive attitude required to be a successful racing pilot. In case that seems like self-flagellation let me rebalance by saying that my Regionals, and occasional Nationals, record has been more or less representative of that of Portmoak trained and based pilots have achieved in the 25 years since I first competed. My question is – can we do anything to improve that in the future?

Over the years some of us have bemoaned the various factors that prevent us progressing – mainly our fewer and less consistent thermal days. We have mused that if we had better weather conditions then we might have reached a higher level and we have seen pilots who have moved south and have taken a significant step forward. I believe that the weather is only one of the influences at play and that there is another factor that we can develop at Portmoak if we have the will, that is, exposure to a culture and mindset of competitive racing.

That top competition pilots have deep a understanding of tactics and techniques we can take as read – literally – that knowledge is easily accessible in books and articles. What is strikingly obvious about the southern pilots, particularly the younger ones, from their international contest record, from the nature of their chat on the ground, and, visibly during contests, from the way that they handle gliders skilfully but positively in the air, is their sheer competitive natures.

The great George Moffat, possibly the most focussed competitor in gliding history, says about practice: “Fly maximum effort cross-countries with pre-selected TPs or AATs, preferably against competition”. What we cross-country pilots at

Portmoak tend to do is to set individual distance thermal tasks that we are



often coy about sharing with other pilots because we are concentrating on competing over distance and ladder tasks. This is perfectly reasonable and valid in itself but little help towards progressing as a racing pilot. I believe that the skills of a racing pilot transfer much better to distance flying than the other way around. In the close flying of a contest it becomes immediately obvious how quickly distance and/or height can be lost to another competitor who is avoiding circling in weak lift or avoiding cruising along a sink line. Then there are the huge gains or losses that can be made by different route selections and that we can never appreciate on our own.

At Lasham, tasks have long been set every suitable weekend and, following that example, for a while back in the 1980s, I ran tasks most summer weekends at Portmoak. We had fun but the weather didn't always arrive on the correct weekend and with the limited weather information then available it was difficult to set the best tasks.

I think that a more practical approach for Portmoak might be for any and all interested pilots to have an informal pre-flight cooperative meeting at a suitable time and place on potential thermal cross-country days. We could mutually agree a task or tasks and then fly them as a race more or less along the lines set down in the BGA competition handbook but without a formal launch grid. We could possibly handicap and score flights using SeeYou Competition (a free add-on to SeeYou) if some computer literate person could help with the initial set-up.

This would not suit some pilots who are concentrating on distance or badge tasks and others might dip in and out according to the weather. That would be fine. There would be no need for there to be a formal group membership, just a desire to race on a particular day. It would be essential to be inclusive rather than elitist and different levels of tasks could be agreed. There may also be days on which Assigned Area Tasks are best – few pilots welcome them but they are part of contests and in many ways they need more practice than straight races. It is worth noting that it would be perfectly easy to

set a smaller minimum distance AAT that included, within the turn areas, the turnpoints for a larger declared badge task.

Most of the current competition pilots at Portmoak are probably too old (me especially) to radically change our ways but we could help each other along a bit and, much more importantly, we could establish an environment in which any emerging young talent could flourish.

Brian Scougall and I flew cooperatively and competitively on a few shared tasks in May and June this year and we both think it helped our contest flying. If this appeals to any other pilots then please let me know and we could think about this for the 2009 thermal season.

John Galloway

Duty Pilot and Duty Instructor rotas

These rotas are now interactive and are available from the club website. The following link takes you straight to the rotas page. It's easy to follow...

<http://www.dutyman.biz/dmmain.aspx?id=S0001434>

