



## Topic of the month: January 2024

### Avoiding Airprox in the Circuit

Over the years we have had several airproxes between gliders at Portmoak. Further investigation revealed that many of these were between a glider launching and a glider in the circuit. The risk of an airprox between a glider in the circuit with a glider on winch launch is further intensified when there is a winch launch failure.

The Safety and CFI teams have analysed this and come up with the following changes to the launch procedure to reduce this risk.

#### When to stop a launch with a glider in circuit

We are usually happy to let a launch proceed when a glider is in the early phase of the downwind leg. The glider in the circuit will still take 1.5 to 2 minutes to land. However, the pilot about to launch may not be able to see a glider on downwind or have heard a radio call, so **the wing runner must inform the pilot that there is a glider on downwind**. P1 may be planning a launch failure exercise and can therefore decide to wait.

During the "take up slack" the wing runner must keep an eye on the glider in the circuit. If this glider passes the line perpendicular to the launch point before the "all out" the launch should be stopped. However, circuits are never the same and not always as shown in the diagram. Depending on

the height of the glider in circuit or its line in the circuit, the launch may be stopped earlier or later. Deciding on this point comes with experience and if in doubt use the line shown in the diagram. Get help from an instructor or qualified pilot with this decision making.

The wing runner must also look thoroughly for other aircraft joining low to the circuit straight from the hill or into the south field, and when looking behind, look for aircraft on long finals.



## Planned and real winch launch failures

Many winch launch failures are training exercises and there is no need to keep the planned simulated launch failure secret from P2. Whenever P1 plans a simulated launch failure and has made P2 aware of this, the information must also be passed to the launch controller and the wingman. **The launch controller, when radioing the winch with the information about glider and cable will add "...simulated launch failure"**. This warns not only the winch driver (who may have a better view of a glider in the circuit, especially in east winds), but also makes any pilot in the circuit aware of this. A pilot in the circuit could repeat their downwind call and warn the launch controller, in case a previous radio call was missed.

**Once the launch is in progress, the launch controller continues monitoring the launch and if there is a launch failure (whether simulated or real) must immediately announce on the radio "launch failure in progress"**. This warns any other pilots. In addition, the launch controller can keep an eye on where the strop comes down if there was a weak link break, which should help retrieving it.

## Use of the radio

These changes add a few radio calls and expand on some. However, it is always important to remember that radios don't always work, or the messages are not heard or understood. All our radio calls are blind call, i.e. we don't wait for confirmation. That means **when you make a radio call, don't assume that anyone as heard you. In fact, always work on the assumption that nobody heard your call.**

## These are changes to our launch procedures with immediate effect

All items **highlighted above** are changes to our current procedures. Please take note and remember the next time you are flying, in the launch caravan, or on the wing of a launching glider.

## Changes to remember:

- ***If there is a glider on the downwind leg but hasn't reached the point to stop the launch, inform the pilot who is about to launch.***
- ***When the P1 is planning a simulated winch launch failure, they should inform the launch controller and wing runner, unless it is an unannounced test.***
- ***If there is a planned winch launch failure, the launch controller must inform the winch driver.***
- ***The launch controller must monitor the launch until it is completed. If there is a winch launch failure, announce this on the radio immediately: "launch failure in progress"***.

Safe Flying,

Wolf