

The Thermal Column



Newsletter of The Rainier Paragliding Club



Serving the Paragliding Community of Western Washington, USA

June 2007

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My First SUV... WOW

By David Griswold

Photo's by David Masuda

It's the first day of Aerial Paragliding's SIV Clinic. I'm on deck 100 feet back from the water's edge of Lake Sammamish all laid out for a forward launch. Flight check done for the umpteenth time. Tow bridles clipped in and hooked onto the tow line with the boat paying out line preparing to give me the ready signal. My mind is reeling, my stomach is in knots and I don't



even want to think about the condition of my britches. I say to myself, "What have you gotten yourself into this time, David? You haven't flown in over 6 months and now your going to go up there and do all the things you've been desperately trying not to do since learning to fly last summer. What the hell were you thinking when you signed up for this. Gees, I hate forward launches!". The tow boat crew gives the hand wave. Denise tells me to take a deep breath and relax. I do my best and give a bow signaling the boat I'm ready. The tow boat powers up paying out line until it's up on plane. At that moment, all my anxiety washes away and I am focused more intently than I've ever been. It's all about the boat, me and getting

the glider overhead. Denise says "let's go." She pulls on the tow line and I lean forward feeling the pressure of the glider. I meet the glider with a bit of brakes as it comes up overhead and run like hell. In a blink of an eye I'm catapulted 100 ft off the ground and going up fast. I check to see that the glider is in line with

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the boat and ease back into the harness as a wave of relief briefly comes over me.

When I first heard that Doug and Denise Strop were putting on an SIV Clinic, I jumped at the opportunity and signed up. My motivations to take the SIV Clinic were; to gain a better understanding of the glider, overcome some of my nervousness while in the air and to see if this sport is really for me. When it came to sending the deposit check, though, I had second thoughts and almost canceled. I talked to a few people before hand about the Clinic and got mixed advice. Some though it was better to wait a year before going. In the end, I trusted Doug and Denise's encouragement.

Two 3-day classes were held back to back, mine being the second. I decided to arrive a day early to check out how the earlier class was getting along. I was amazed to find 2 reserve chutes hanging in the trees drying out, pilots doing wingovers, stalls, SAT's and helicopters. I thought, "I'm really in over my head here maybe I should just head on home." But, talking with everyone, I became more relaxed as they explained the events leading up to this last day. Some of the participants were accomplished pilots interested in learning Acro. Everyone I talked to said they had gained years worth of flying experience in a mere three days.

The clinic started with introductions, briefing of the days events, and an intro to towing. Brad Gunnuscio, competition XC and Acro pilot from Salt Lake City instructed the SIV with Doug and Denise

facilitating. Stuart Caruk from tow-meup.com came up from the Portland area with his tow boat and did all the towing operations. There were 9 participants (including Tim Walsh and myself) with a wide range of skill levels, from new P2's, like myself, to P4's with 10 years and hundreds of hours of flight time. Most had never taken an SIV Clinic. We were all assigned launch numbers and before we knew it, the first person was on deck.

I had never towed before, and it was very unsettling at first because the wing sets quite far behind in flight. The object



is to follow the tow boat until a few hundred feet off the deck and then follow the first few hundred feet

of tow line thereafter. The tricky part for me came during the turn at the end of the lake which leads back to launch. The object is to fly to the outside of the boat's turning radius and not short cut the turn. This puts slack in the line and causes jerking and loss of altitude as the boat tries to take up the slack by either reeling in or speeding up. All the control is on the pilot, the boat can do very little to prevent this. There were times when the boat was going 180 degrees from my heading, which is very weird, hence following the tow line, not the boat. Piloting took constant vigilance; looking at the wing, then looking at

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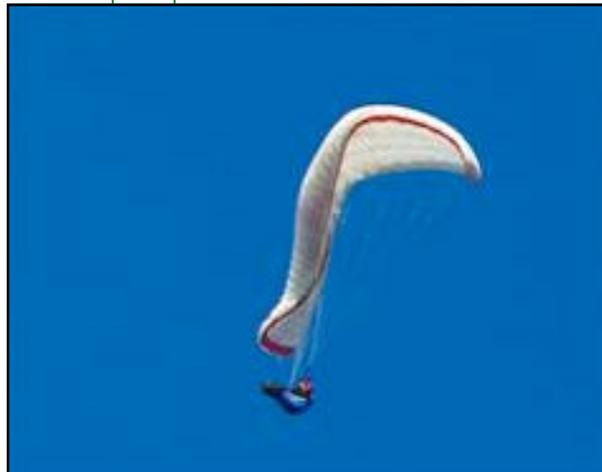
the towline repeatedly every 10 seconds. With so much pressure on the wing, there was little sensitivity and the only way to be assured it is flying true was by looking. Wind greatly affects our heights; 2,000 – 2,500' over during our clinic.

The first day's exercises were the same for everyone, asymmetric deflations, frontal deflations, pitch

control, B-line stalls and locked in spirals. We started off small with asymmetrics, first pulling a few A-risers and immediately letting go, progressing to grabbing all the A's on one side as far up as possible, pulling down 70% of the wing and holding it there controlling the glider with weight shift and brake. It was amazing how easy it was to control the glider with only 30% of the wing flying. Brad instructed me to set up my landing approach in this configuration until over land and 200 over! All of us were able to do this quite easily. Next were frontals. Again, starting small and moving up to "big mac daddies", where all the A-risers were grabbed as high as possible and thrown down. Then we moved on to B-line stalls and induced pitch oscillations, which I found were straight forward and fun to do. I actually had to B-line to get out of a cloud after a very high



tow! Spirals were next and I was apprehensive. Brad was adamant about having us do them early on with the reasoning that a large deflation not corrected in time can easily send you into a spiral. I only did one and did everything correctly but it was real freaky, to say the least. Words can not describe the amount of power that quickly builds up when the wing goes from vertical in a steep 360 to horizontal and heading straight down in a full on spiral!! To get out, I centered my weight and went to full brakes until the wing went vertical again, then went right back in for 2 more turns to bleed off energy. I had the option to do another right after the first, but declined. I needed to let it sink in to my brain before having another go. Needless to say, I want to practice these some more until I become more comfortable with them.



The second day started out with an epic flight in a rain squall that came on suddenly while on tow (wasn't me, fortunately).

After that we all called the day due to the weather.

The third and final day was a review of the first. We added full speed bar to our deflations, asymmetric and frontals. Here the wing reacted much more radically

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but still easily controlled if I reacted quickly. I really got the sense of how easily the wing would enter into a spiral if a large asymmetric was left unattended, especially while on speed bar. Stalls were next on our plate and in a way I was looking forward to them. Brad had a two step recovery system which when done correctly minimizes the large surge that stalls are known for. From the ground, they did not look much more dramatic than a large frontal. Reports from the pilots that performed them concurred. I did not get my chance, unfortunately, the day ended abruptly when the hydraulic pump on the tow boat broke.

Brad is an excellent instructor; knowledgeable, patient, positive and a fun guy to be around. He allowed me to move at my pace, encouraging me but never pushing me into something I wasn't ready for. He had several mantra's, but the one that has stuck with me most was, "Embrace the surge. The surge is energy and energy is your friend." Doug and Denise were there making sure everyone was having a good time, answering our many questions and seeing that the clinic ran smoothly. Even though I was a nervous wreck through the whole clinic, I felt at home and reassured that I was in the hands of very competent people willing to share everything they know.

So, was it worth it? Well, for this P2, YES! I have noticed a big improvement in my flying and confidence in my ability to control the glider. This was only my first SIV Clinic, not my last. For those interested, the next Aerial Paragliding's SIV Clinics will be held July 21st - 26th.

"The P3 Experience"

By Mike McIntyre

In mid-May, at the annual "spring fling" campout and flying event held by the RPC at Fort Ebey in Washington state, four of us p2's sat down at a picnic table to take the p3 exam. We had been generously invited to do so by our current instructor, Kim Smith.



All of us had been flying for at least two years at various mountain and coastal sites, mainly here in Washington State, but also to some extent in California and Arizona. All of us had flown with Kim from time to time, so he had plenty of opportunity to watch our progress, abilities, and completion of assigned tasks. All during this period he had offered us tips, advice, and instruction in a variety of conditions, launches and Iz's.

So with admonitions from, Kim, like "Don't look at each others answers!" and "I'll be standing right over you watching," we set pen to paper and started answering questions. Now as all of you p3's plus already know, and p2's aspiring to p3 status will find out, some of those answers in the multiple choice exam can be pretty ambiguous, so ambiguous in fact, that even though there is a "right" answer to each question, even advanced pilot might choose another answer as "better." Fortunately for us, we had all joined the RPC, started a study group, and obtained mate-

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View From My Window

By Jim Baldo



It's hard to believe that it's already July. It seems the flying this year has not been stellar but flights are available for those that choose to find them. Personally, I'm finding myself more selective this year as the cost to fly has increased with the price of gas and my wing selection has lowered my risk tolerance.

Moving to a new, higher performance wing this year has been quite a learning experience. Gone is that confidence that was built over many years flying my previous aircraft. This is not necessarily a bad thing as it provides a new and fresh perspective to the sport. I find myself observing more from launch unwilling to be the first to test the conditions. And while flying, I find myself at a heightened state of attention and just a wee bit nervous. This allows me to better question my flying decisions and rethink my piloting choices. I am truly a P2 again but this time with much more experience and much more able to handle and enjoy the rigors of piloting. And I find myself having to redefine how to fly a wing – trim speed brake pressure, launching and landing performance, thermaling performance, turning and spiraling performance, collapse recovery, big ears, B-lines, speedbar – all are no longer routine but now adrenaline pumping maneuvers.

And for taking this backward trip, I'm able to reap the benefits that a higher performance wing provides. I'm

finding that I'm becoming hooked on the speed, turn, and energy retention characteristics that this wing delivers. I'm finding new thrills in just zooming around the sky feeling that my bonds to the LZ have been somewhat loosened. And in those aspects of flight, my confidence has improved. This journey is just beginning. I'm sure there are more adventures to come.

Has the step up been worth it? The jury is still out on that decision, but at least now I'm beginning to answer that question. As I've said before, the decision to step up is not one that a pilot should take lightly and it's not one that should be taken until you're well experienced and active flying is a thoughtless process. And after doing so, one must be prepared to devote the conscious effort required to relearn the art of paragliding once again. Always remember that the wing is only as good as it's pilot and not the other way around.

June continued the RPC campout season with the great success of the Bremer campout. It was fun to join most club members in the skies over Bremer. Many thanks goes to Kim and Kathy Smith for hosting such a great event and for all their hard work. Also, a big thank you to Steve Messman for his work on the grill cooking the steaks, hamburgers and kabobs to perfection. And finally, many thanks to Mike McIntyre, Mike Lervick., Kim Smith, and Dave Griswold for the use of their vehicles to transport pilots. If you missed this event, plan now for next year's rendition.

Meet Kathryn Thomas

I am a relatively new pilot. I was always afraid of flying and heights, but I decided to face them and went on a tandem flight in March 2006 on my birthday. I was speechless during the flight, not scared. When I landed, I knew I had to learn how to solo because I wanted to go again and again. A year ago, I signed up at Torrey Pines in San Diego and then finished my P2 at Tiger Mountain under Bob Rinker. Since then, I have flown mostly at Tiger, some flights in Maui last January, and a maneuvers clinic in La Grange with Ann O'Connor. I had a very scary first flight at Whidbey two weeks ago with high winds, and a (safe) beach landing, but I questioned continuing the sport after that. Now that I have had some time to evaluate and go back to basics, I realize that



experience made me a better pilot ultimately. I need some more flying in good conditions to build up my confidence and experience. Tim Walsh recommended your group to me, so here I am!

Aside from that, I am an RN, and I work in Neonatal Intensive care, and am also an Infusion Specialist for the Mary Bridge Pediatric Home Health Team. I have my own rowing club (Rainier Rowing

Club/Academy) on American Lake, I coach privately, and I am head coach for the junior team. I train in my single shell to keep in shape. Rowing and flying go well together: row in the morning, fly in the afternoon/evening. I am a single mom with an 11 year old son. I live in the north end of Tacoma in a 1917 Craftsman which challenges me to learn all kinds of new skills. I have an old Airstream that I will probably retire with and take to some of the flying sites, and I am quite fond of my truck. I am not one to venture out and fly alone at this point, so I look forward to having some flying buddies! I like this group already.

Thank you for the warm welcome.

Kathryn

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rials over the internet, like copies of the exam and aeronautical charts. Also, through our 2-years plus of flying with other pilots of all skill levels, and our local club, we had learned through experience things that might not have been so clear just from books.

After all of us had completed our exams and were eager to know how we had done, it turned out that Kim views the exam as a perfect opportunity for additional classroom training, so for the next couple of hours we went over it question by question and sorted out some of those ambiguities. Our simple p3 exam had turned into a three hour classroom session!! So, all of us having passed the exam and the other required tasks, we're now p3's, but we are further moved to talk about what all that means. Are we better pilots than we were

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Getting Back on the Horse

By Chris King

As many of you have heard or know, I had a major collapse of my wing during a recent flight. It really put the reality of the unpredictability of our sport into my mind and the importance of choosing good equipment and being a careful and active pilot. "That just scared the crap (Mormon swear word used during panic situations, a not required to repent of product of panic) out of me!!!" My adrenaline filled voice filled the radio to Mike and Wayne who were also exploring three dimensional space of our secret flying spot, "Did you see that?" They hadn't.



The whole experience was intriguing. I learned, in a few seconds, what my wing would do, what I would do, and how my mind and body would react. I was really surprised, and strangely comforted during this haunting event and the newfound experience of near death! (Sounds more exciting to read by stating it this way.)

I was flying at about 4000 feet. I was on the way up in a thermal and chose to exit rather than go up the rest of the way to the clouds. They were just a couple of hundred feet up and I had been there a couple of times already. I decided that I wanted to go ahead and get back up to the clouds and made a turn to enter back into the ther-

mal when it happened. My wing hit what felt like a wall. It quickly collapsed in a cascading wiggly rope fashion, made popular in the dance movements of a break dancer's arms, and dropped smartly in front of me and to the left side. I felt like Wile-E-Coyote frozen in mid air just before gravity was able to take over and suddenly take me towards the cushioning and compacting effects of rock piles and trees a few thousand feet below. Back through trying to cross risers I went freefalling in a death plunge. The wing exploded as it loaded up and then after what could only be described as several award winning acro maneuvers my hands shot up and with mild inputs to control wing surges, the wing, following its designed flight characteristics, came out of the menagerie of spirals and a breathtakingly huge wingover. I remember thinking, so this is a wing over. I have actually seen video of Mike Kung doing this. No one else would dare. My body was literally ablaze, completely saturated with the rush of adrenaline. I could feel that sweat was pouring out



of every pore on my skin's surface. I remember being completely aware of every part of my body going through this. It was as if my brain was going through a deep scan of systems on board.

During the whole of the experience my mind was on an absolute hair-trigger alert, responsive, and could not concentrate or fix on references to the ground. Things were happening so fast that

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it couldn't process that part. So I focused on flying the wing. This made it a very precise and concentrated effort. My first reaction was to reach for and grab my reserve handle. Because I had plenty of elevation I opted out to see if the wing could be worked out. The rest was dealing with surges, a couple of spirals and their G-forces, and repeated collapses that went from one side then the other. When hands went up and gentle inputs took over, wing design took over and the wing came out of its mishap. After shaking it off I went out into the calm valley air and landed. Swew!!!!

The Bremer campout was rewarding to me. It was the first flights since the episode and it was necessary for me to get back into the air. You see when one goes through an experience like this you do not just do it once. I have relived it in my mind, analyzing it, playing it back and forth over and over again. Not necessarily because I wanted to but because that's where my mind was going. It was as if it was calculating, addressing, drawing conclusions, relating the winds, conditions, forces at play, feeling, purposely setting to memory what had happened so that if it happens again I would deal with it with finesse and better control. Better yet, it was providing a balance of reason for future flights and the eventuality of attending a safety course in the very near future.

So here goes, the top of Bremer. So this is what it is like to get ready to get back on the horse. What was a Shetland pony only a few weeks ago was now a

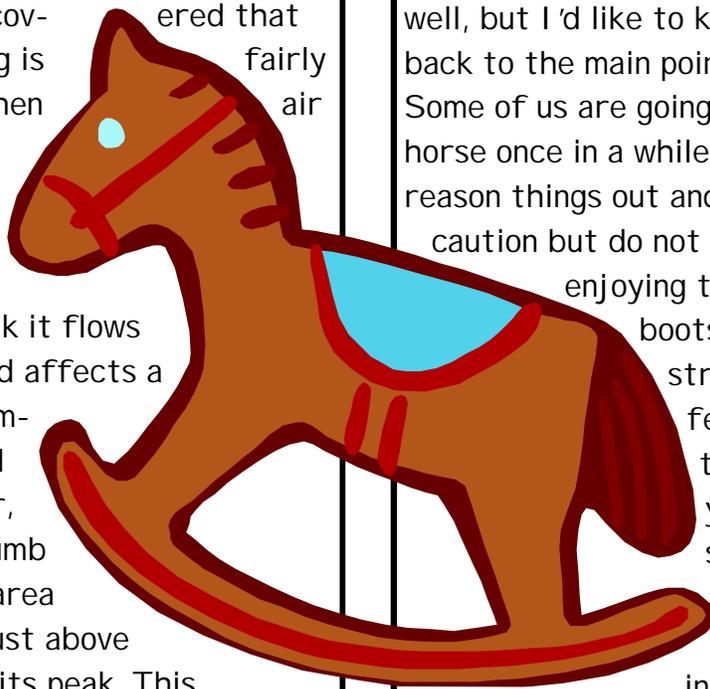
high strung, 20 hand, Draft horse. Launching wasn't a problem, but once in the air, every bump, no matter how small, I was certain I was going to go for the plunge again. I stayed up as long as I could take it and I retired to the LZ. One hour, ok. That was good. The second flight, the air was a little more bouncy but I could take it. Just get comfortable and trust the equipment. I was a lot more relaxed this time. But, oh my, was it good to get back on the ground. 45 minutes. Ok. Not as long but everything went well. The Saturday evening flight. Ok. I'll at least volunteer to drive so I won't have to be committed to fly and look like a wimp if I suddenly backed out. It would be a safe way to get up to the top and feel how I would feel about another flight. Boy does it look good! Look at Mike go. He is way up there and the air looks pretty decent. The clouds have moderated and the winds, dang, they are a little punchy but still ... I ... I can do this. Not knowing about my fears and



thoughts, Mike radioed the determining call, "Chris ... there are plenty of drivers if you want to fly come on up, the air is fine."

My set up took seconds. Jim Baldo launched and then I was next. Preflight and here goes. It was even more bumpy. This time however, I was more relaxed and elated to be flying again. This was the ride I needed during the whole trip. It was the one that just sunk in as flavorful and fun. I actually felt more to the normal side of flying this time. When I landed an hour later, I did so with confidence in my sails again. This was the flight that I needed to finally feel better. Chris, the beating vigorously on his chest man, is back in the saddle again and ready to do a Tarzan yell!

What I would do next time? Be aware. I thought I was. But there is more to it than just flying and keeping a little pressure on the brakes to control the wing as it flutters through the air. It is important to study and know the characteristics of the terrain and winds that can develop there at any given time. After research, I discovered that the site I was flying is fairly sharply peaked. When air rises up the face it descends down the back side modeling to some degree the contours of the peak it flows on. Where this wind affects a pilot depends on temperature, the speed of the ascending air, etc. The rule of thumb is not to fly in the area of the hill that is just above and slightly behind its peak. This force can literally flip a sailplane. Just think of what it can do to a cloth canopy.



Is it always there? No, but in my case it only took once. My wing hit the wall of rising air from the front of the hill and the other side pushed down in the descending air. What was a valley full of nice smooth air still had its ripples and turbulence. Another thing about the terrain at the site we flew that day is it has a ridge that splits the headwinds and thermals. It also has a tendency to redirect thermals to either side that occasionally gives the sink side of the hill lift while moments later one will experience a lot of sink. It has to come together somewhere. This is at the top of the mountain and depending on wind strength and direction can converge anywhere along the ridge. Being aware of this can help determine where to fly to avoid, or at least prepare for, the rough unstable air. Stay out and in front of the ridges.

Many other thoughts have been shared and other conclusions drawn as well, but I'd like to keep it short and back to the main point I wanted to share. Some of us are going to be bucked off a horse once in a while. Let fear help you reason things out and build a little more caution but do not let it keep you from enjoying the ride. Put on your boots, cinch up the straps, and slide your feet confidently into the stirrups. Seat yourself deep in the saddle, gently spur the flanks and ride that trusty steed into the sunset of another peaceful experience.

Application to join the Rainier Paragliding Club

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

E-mail: _____

USHPA #: _____ Rating: _____ Exp. Date _____

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Annual dues are from July 1st to June 30th of each year.

\$24 for Individual membership

\$36 for Family membership living at the same address.

Send completed application and payment (payable to Rainier Paragliding Club) to:

Kathy Smith

P.O. Box 13

Cinebar, WA 98533

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last week? Not much, really, and all of that little difference is attributed to our extra 3 hours in the classroom. We're certainly better pilots than we were a year ago, but that's due to the varied flying experiences and association with other pilots we've had over our flying careers and continue to have. Our consensus is that the pursuit of a p3 classification is well worthwhile as a way to focus our efforts and give a little structure to the process, but that the main value lies in the experiences we've had in the 2 plus years we've all been flying, and in the friends and instructors who have helped us do it safely. Mike

Calendar 2007

July 28	Tiger Mountain Fly-I n
Aug 10-12	Can-Am Black Mountain
Sept 1-3	Pine Mountain Fly-I n
Sept 14-16	* Northern Lite Campout.
Sept 22-23	Baldy Fly-I n
Oct 19-21	*Saddle Soar Campout

(*) denotes RPC sponsored activity