

New Flying Season

These last 18-24 months has been a rough and rocky road. Due to Covid coming and going, many have been in lockdown at home like doing a prison sentence. Now daylight savings is just around the corner and with lockdown finishing and the flying season coming on, this could be allowing us out of the house and onto the hill for some of us to have their first flying days in a long time. Below is a list of things that I thought of that could help our newer pilots but also experienced pilots that have been away from flying.

- Is your SAFA membership in date and have you received your membership sticker
- Have you paid your local site /club membership fees
- When was the last time you have packed or had your reserve packed
- Is your Spot / In reach subscription up to date
- Insurances if moving about interstate or if you are lucky internationally
- Instruments charged and ready, e.g. radio, vario's, phone apps downloaded and updated
- When was the last time you had the glider trimmed
- When was the last time the glider was porosity checked if older than a few years
- Has your site changed since last flying and are there any new hazards or rules in place
- Updated weather apps and logging apps
- Do you have a flight plan for your first flight back
- Have you refreshed you First Aid Cert or Safety Officer training
- Is your level of fitness ready for hiking up hills after bombing out

After long layoffs from flying, we can lose our currency and more importantly our skillsets that enable us to fly safe just like a cricketer, you need to get your eye in and start off slowly again and not race back to flying like you did when you were clocking up 50/100+ hours in a season.

Things you used to do last season may seem like you can do them easily now, but due to inactivity, the mind and body can take a bit of time to get back on top of the sport.

We are overly keen, which can make us rush and check less, we are excessively out of practice after a long break.

Currency is a huge factor in paragliding safety - as well as many other activities - and currency we don't have right now. Even experienced pilots will find that after a long break from flying, it seems more of a mission to have our gear sorted, to nail our launches, to do everything right.

The less experienced you are, meaning the less well practiced and somewhat automated all your procedures and skills are prior to a long break, the more likely slips and mistakes happen after extended absence of practice, especially when adding increased excitement and nerves.

Plan to gather all your equipment before heading on a flyable day down at the local park and start going over everything. Lay all the gear needed for flying out on a nil wind day and start by looking over everything.

Harness

- Start with the harness is the reserve in date – some reserves have a 10 year life span and others can have 12 years depending on brand and manufacturers specs
- Check over the harness for any corrosion on metal items in harness, do the screw gates open up and is there any sand or grit inside them causing them trouble to close. A pilot recently explained that he had bought gear from someone who had it stashed away in a cupboard for many years and the karabiner had completely corroded away and could not have been seen unless the Karabiner was taken off the webbing of harness this was thought to be caused from coastal flying and older style Karabiner types
- Check the harness for any rips and tears as well as fraying and go over the stitching. You don't have to be a master rigger to see something could be wrong and it may save you from injury down the track
- Look at the zippers whether they are broken and check all the pockets for anything left in over the last few months, you could find some food from last season rotting away
- Look at your speed bar and see if the cord has fraying, you don't need it braking on your first strong wind flight
- Check the seat board hasn't been damaged and if an air bag, check it is working correctly
- Check that any safety items like cushioning or padding is not damaged and if so replace to manufacturers specs
- Have your hook knife secured onto your harness

Safety Items

- Look at your helmet is it past its use by date – meaning damaged and interior lining needs a new reline or the helmet is good for a few more years
- Have you checked the radio you use and hand piece or Push to talk (PTT) are working and wires are not broken or faulty, also check that the radio battery has not corroded in the pouch and in need of a new battery.
- Check your radio is programmed for HGFA 1 - 472.125MHz
- Vario is updated and new version software installed or maps uploaded and updated
- Shoes do you have good quality boots that help with ankle support and great for hiking
- Clothing have you started to look at feeling comfortable in the air and when you are flying comfortable you can focus more on your flying
- Is your stash bag or concertina bag in good shape, cords not frayed and ready to break

Glider

- Lay the glider out and start with the Maillons Rapide Links or Slinks-soft links - are they tight and not loose, are the rubber bumpers or plastic stoppers in place and not loose or falling out
- Look at the risers and the speed system are the pulleys, button clips for brakes and magnets all in working order with no nicks or sharp burrs that will cut the line
- Is it time for the glider to get a trim – some manufacturers say that after 100 hours you should trim the glider and other even far earlier, if you are unsure contact the manufacturer who sold you the wing and ask the question
- Next start by looking at each individual line and run your pointer finger and thumb along each line feeling for any kinks or cuts or unravelling of the line
- When doing line checks start by checking under the rapide links for fraying
- If your brake handle does not have swivels then are the brake lines all kinked up and need untwisting
- Check each attachment point to the canopy is not frayed and check the cascades are not fraying
- Check where the lines connect to the glider that they are sitting correctly on attachment point and not off to the side
- Does the glider have any mildew from being stored incorrectly
- Onto the glider you should be cleaning it out of any sand, grass, twigs and dead bugs
- Look inside each cell for any damage or stitching coming undone as well as anything inside that may affect the flying characteristics for example: shark nose has cuts on leading edge or the rods inside are all bent or buckled
- Look over the leading edge, top surface and underneath for any chemical stains like grease or blood or animal liquids that can affect the gliders porosity

After doing all this it's time to get all the gear on and ground handle, doing this can show you things that you may not have thought of and can help find issues with anything we have discussed up above. I would rather find out my brake knot has come undone or is loose on a park then on a launch in front of everyone who is keen to fly again.

If you are feeling like you may need a refresher then why not ask your local instructor or flying school you started with for a refresher course.

All these checks may help in case of finding something that is needed and delivery can take a few days to weeks and in that case you will be ready on launch and not still at home awaiting gear to be delivered.

Experience makes a difference

A pilot's experience is traditionally measured in terms of logged flying hours. This is because relying on a pilot's own opinion of their flying skills would result in almost all pilots being absolutely perfect. The experience level may also have a bearing on the types of errors that might arise after a period of abstinence (from flying).

For example, a very low hour pilot might suffer degradation to basic motor skills, while a higher hour pilot might find that certain activities that were performed automatically before the break may now require some conscious thought. That may lead to over-thinking or even some self-doubt about the retained skill levels. According to Murphy's Law, this will occur at the worst possible time.

Mental rehearsal

Mental rehearsal is a strategy that becomes more common on the higher rungs of the success ladder. This is quite common with elite athletes and has also been practised in progressive businesses for many years.

Also remember that each new flying season brings with it new students and older pilots who may not have flown for a while and will come to the launch not knowing each other. It's a great way to say hi, be the first to be the nice person to introduce yourself. It's always great to have a positive vibe on launch and flying so be positive and have a laugh with everyone. Don't stand back. Make yourself known and ask what everyone thinks the weather is doing and more importantly what is everyone's level of experience, who knows, you may make a lifelong friend.

