

## Sky Brontes

REPORT BY STUART MARTIN



Generally I pay little attention to any of the flight tests that appear in the rags, but when asked to test a glider for Skywings I began to read every article I could lay my hands on. I don't make any outlandish claims about my abilities other than being a safe pilot; as such believe that *the* most important aspect of any glider's characteristics is centred around security, because from this comes enjoyment and, ultimately, safe flying. I fly for fun and enjoyment, and if I'm not achieving this I'm prepared to pack up and go home. This is the perspective that I adopted for this test.

I'd like to be able to say that I pitched up on the hill, tipped the glider out of the bag and flew, then went home having had a good time whilst grinning like a cat from Cheshire. However just for once in my life I read the instructions, and that's where I'll start.

### the manual

The Brontes is an intermediate-level DHV2 glider from Czech company Sky. The manual provided was in Czech or Slovak and the English version that eventual came my way was e-mailed to me with no gloss or fancy graphics, so I have no idea if the 'real' version has all the pizzazz we see from some other well-known manufacturers and I'm unable to comment on this aspect of the literature.

The opening statement tells us that the Brontes is 'a fine paraglider of which we are justifiably proud.' Fair enough, but I'm not so sure about Sky being 'one of the oldest continually operating manufacturers of paragliders in the world.' The grammar and layout of the text is better than some I have seen in the past and *doesn't* resemble the proverbial Taiwanese video-recorder manual. Every aspect of technicality is covered here for the geeks, as well as all the usual dos, don'ts, recommendations and warnings, including three comprehensive sections that cover practically every flying situation and eventuality.

### construction

I would expect all certificated gliders these days to attain a minimum build quality; I don't spend my time poking around inside paragliders any more than I do inside the body panels of my car. However the stitching was tidy without any bunching of material, hemmed neatly at the edges and with a reinforced trailing edge. All of the Edelrid lines are attached to loops; this may appear an obvious statement but I have seen one or two gliders with lines sewn into the undersurface - in my humble opinion a hassle for line replacement.

All surfaces, ribs and diagonals are made of Skytex 9017 by Porcher Marine (no mention of material weight), which to me means that it is ok to ditch one's glider into the sea without ruining the material. The Brontes displays no unique material or design characteristics. Like many gliders it follows the traditional pattern of a fully-open leading edge with rectangular cells, profile reinforcement at the

leading edge, internal diagonals and a high degree of line cascading. In other words there's nothing about this design that makes it instantly recognisable from the rest of the herd.

The risers are not quite as complicated as the drawing in the manual suggests. There are five colour-coded risers each side with split As to facilitate big ears - joined, for some inexplicable reason, with velcro, but more about that later. All maillons are fitted with plastic inserts to keep the lines in place. The lines were yellow and pink, with all As the latter colour except for one single pink line on the B-riser. This cascades out to five attachment points at the wingtip; two on the outermost tip in A and B positions, and three inboard of these aligned fore-and-aft in the A, B and C positions. I tried pulling on them in flight to see what happened - nothing really - and I am unsure why they are pink.

As is quite common at the moment, the brake handles are attached to the risers using magnetic clips with each brake line cascading to 13 trailing-edge attachment points. The outer four lines are routed via plastic rings sewn to the trailing edge a short distance from the line attachment. Brake application pulls the line through the rings, shortening the trailing edge so that it is 'crimped', very much like some Advance gliders. The glider was an attractive 'sunflower' yellow on the topside and white underneath with a blue/yellow spanwise stripe.

### launch

Some of my most embarrassing moments in paragliding have been on the ground whilst struggling to control a glider. It is important that a glider handles at least predictably during the launch and landing phase, especially if one is operating in a restricted area. This glider was well behaved and showed no tendency to try and launch itself every time I took my eyes off it or let go of the brakes or risers. My own simple test involves reverse launching the glider 'hands free' using the hips, and I have to say that this glider struggled to get above my head on the dozen or so attempts that I made and generally required a little help with the risers.

This is not a criticism but points, I hope, to the fact that it is relatively docile during launch with no apparent surge towards the top to take it over the front. All my launches were the reverse type and I'm unable to comment on how it Alpine launches.

### in the air

Despite some ribbing about the glider's Eastern European provenance (and being likened to a well-known car from the same area) it did not let itself down. On my first flight - and first of the day - I was able to launch flawlessly into an empty sky in front of a large and critical audience. Initial impressions linger, and within the first few minutes I was impressed with the tight handling of the Brontes. I'm not ashamed to say that I enjoyed this aspect more than on my own Advance Sigma, a glider renowned for precise handling.

However there's more to a good glider than handling alone. During all the occasions that I flew the Brontes it was thermic, and on the first day I attempted to tighten up my chest strap on account of the considerable feedback into my harness, only to discover that it was already fully closed. Some pilots may not mind being constantly tipped around under their wings but it is not my preference, and I am not keen on not being able to adjust it out; I like to have that option when the going gets rough. Although I did come to terms with it some pilots may find it uncomfortable and distracting.

Back to those A-risers. After less than a minute in the air on my first flight I flew the wingtip into the edge of a thermal, got the feedback described above and fell to the side of my harness, all accompanied by a ripping sound that had me looking for my reserve han-



## specification

Model	S	M	L
No. of cells	59	59	59
Span (projected, m)	9.46	9.86	10.25
Area (flat, m <sup>2</sup> )	24.77	26.88	29.07
Aspect ratio (flat)	5.29:1	5.29:1	5.29:1
All-up weight range (kg)	65 - 85	80 - 105	100 - 130
DHV2 certification	DHV2	DHV2	DHV2
Guarantee	3 years materials and workmanship		
Price	£1,850	£1,850	£1,850

UK importer: Flight Culture, 15 High Street, Fordington, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JZ, tel: 01305 267027, e-mail: johnwelch@flightculture.co.uk, website: www.flightculture.co.uk



## Stuart Martin

I came into the sport via parasending in the summer of 1974 and became a parasending instructor in 1979 at the age of 19, but soon became bored with spending all my time trying to land parachutes on a disc the size of a Kitty-Kat lid (although I understand that 20-something years later some people still do this). Inspired by Walter Neumark and others I took my first 'XC' out of Andover airfield in 1979 - only to be bollocked for leaving the ATZ!

I tried my hand at foot launching at about the same time but with little success, and in the meantime waited for someone to invent the paraglider. I took to foot launching as soon as it became practicable, became a foot-launch instructor in 1991 and even remember seeing Richard Westgate off on his first XC in Wales.

I have travelled and flown in many unusual places throughout the world but now reside in Dorset, an active member of the country's most friendly club, the Mighty Wessex. My motto? 'There's no better place to chuck one's reserve!'

die (private joke). It wasn't the renting of Skytex or the parting of lines but the separating of the velcro between the A-risers. Once I had established this much I relaxed, after which it became a constant source of annoyance and, unless I have missed something fundamental, I am unable to find a good reason why it needs to be there.

A glider that resists turning can soon become very tiresome after an hour or so or even during one climb to base. I once had a glider that was such hard work to get around corners that it was like manoeuvring a London bus in a car park, and consequently prolonged climbs necessitated hooking the brake into my harness. However thermalling the Brontes was effortless and it would turn smartly without huge brake inputs; once into a 360 it would continue round without continual fiddling with the brakes. To make life that little bit more enjoyable the pressures were firm but not so resistant as to necessitate tying the brakes off to my leg straps. This glider is no London bus: it turned like a black cab with no need to weight-shift or any tendency to fly out of turns halfway around. In this respect the cornering ability of the Brontes is on par with one of my favourite gliders, the Gin Bandit.

On my second outing I spent an hour or so thermalling on my own in a light north-westerly. Flying in and out of the thermals required little action on my part to control the glider in pitch, and during my four hours airtime it did nothing alarming. Velcro and feedback into the harness aside, I found that the Brontes provided the kind of relaxing and enjoyable flying experience that suits me. Even pulling on the odd bits of string or doing big ears, which work well and are easy to get out

without excessive brake input, did not arouse any bad behaviour to spoil my fun.

At one point during the second outing I became convinced that in a straight line the glider was a slug, even though I was flying at the top end of the weight range (108kg). However I checked out the stats and the claimed speeds are around 37km/h unaccelerated and 52km/h accelerated, about equal to similar gliders and maybe a few km/h faster at the accelerated speed. Of course this is all relative - if you want to fly really fast then go buy a hang glider.

## conclusion

Apart from the velcro issue - I'm sorry to keep bleating about it - and assuming one has no problem with the feedback into the harness, I am unable to fault the Brontes. It gave me several hours of fun, the handling was easy with no scary moments and I enjoyed flying it - and in a perverse kind of way I enjoyed the attention it drew. However it is a DHV2 rated wing and has all the attributes that go with it.

The bottom line on any review must be, 'Would you buy it?' Although I'm brand conscious (not be confused with brand loyal) about practically everything I own, I wouldn't claim to be so about paragliders. When choosing a glider there are many important considerations to take into account apart from the price: repair and service support, handling, suitability to the individual pilot and so on. Despite Sky having been on the scene for a long time, I can't comment on the first two aspects having had no dealings with them.

The other bottom line is the price. Flight Culture list the Brontes at £1,850. My initial assumption was that,

as an Eastern European product, it would, just like the cars, be priced to attract a particular segment of the customer base. However it costs about the same as everything else, so the 'economy/no frills' pitch goes out of the window. For this reason I think Sky may have their work cut out to make a serious mark on the already oversubscribed and highly competitive glider market, currently dominated by a number of tried and trusted names.

## importer's comment

I'm glad that Stuart enjoyed flying the Brontes, however he did miss out on a few points, not least the speed bar. It's this and the precise handling that separate the Brontes from the herd. Full speed bar is a revelation: the glider sinks slightly and then accelerates forward with a sink rate only marginally different to that of normal trim (<1.1 m/s!). As an XC machine this puts it in a league of its own.

The odd-coloured B-line that Stuart mentioned is the stabilo line, useful in freeing a cravat. The velcro on the split As assists inflation, but if they come apart it doesn't really matter. The bag Stewart got with the glider isn't the one normally supplied - apologies!

Full repair and service support is available through The Loft. Regarding cost, Stuart's Sigma or the Bandit would set you back several hundred pounds more. But he's right, the Brontes isn't a econo/no frills glider, it's made from top-quality materials with excellent build quality and awesome performance.