

FIDES 2 – review by Vol Libre (10/2005)

AERO CONCEPT AND SKY PARAGLIDERS

A first SKY Paragliders import attempt in France was driven by Denis Charlot at the end of the last century. At the time Vol Libre had tested the excellent Divine, a good compromise between performance and safety. The tide then turned for the company with the death of the designer at the PWC in Spain. After a little dabbling with other products another wing, the Flirt was tested in Vol Libre 299. It was in November 2000 at the French Championships at Reunion. Contact was then established between the Czechs and Alexandre Paux, well known through MCC Aviation and Callipt'air for very remarkable wings such as the Challenger, the Contest, the V56, the Vectis and the Serenis. Aero concept was born and soon after came some excellent SKY Paragliders, the Lift then the Brontes, the Fides and finally the Atis. One was to discover at the 32nd Icarus Cup, the Ares, with great performance. The range was reinforced with a new school glider, the Fides 2. It's light: 4.8kg. Which means it can double up as a mountain wing!



STARTING OFF

A little care when packing away will avoid knots in the upper cascade when untangling. A flick of the wrist is not sufficient.

Simpler cell design with the Fides 2! A slightly ruffled leading edge does nothing to prevent a progressive inflation from a moderate action on the front risers. The final phase of inflation is autonomous with very little pressure felt as the wing lifts up. As with mountain wings the light canopy only requires a moderate pressure to inflate it. Too much energy will cause overshooting which must be damped. On the other hand in a strong wind the wing settles itself directly above the pilot, with no tendency to wrench.

IN FLIGHT

At 92kg in the middle of the weight range for the medium, the Fides 2 does 35km/h. Fully pushing the speed bar gives me 44km/h, very useful in the wind during the first flight at Le col de la Forclaz. An induced frontal collapse shows the stability and ease of reopening, without destabilisation. It is well within the DHV 1 range. The wing gives the freedom to fly with hands-up or full speedbar.

Later large induced destabilisations reinforce this stability. Damping is limited in small oscillations but reassuring when exiting 360's or B line stalls. No problems either in avoidance manoeuvres. At worst the leading edge flattens to 30 to 45 degrees to calm things down. Straight flight is regained with just one oscillation.

Slowing to 30km/h requires 20cm of brake and 1.5kg of pressure, giving minimum sink. The first few centimetres give great pitch control with no significant reduction in speed. 10cm and 1kg more are needed to maintain 27km/h with exemplary pitch and roll stability. Stall point is only achieved with a wrap with more than 70cm of brake and 8kg of pressure.

Turning requires brake travel rather than pressure. Initiating turns only results in a tiny amount of inverse roll which is quickly damped at around 20cm of brake. An efficient turn needs 20cm of brake with a progressive response and only 3kg of pressure. A small amount of roll before the completion of a 360 requires slight weightshift to maintain the turn while thermalling. Applying 30cm gives a lovely turn with no need for the weight shift. This great response to the controls with average pressures doesn't



mean the chest strap has to be loosened. Pressures don't exceed 4.5kg for standard turns. Therefore flying in turbulence isn't tiring and allows fairly heavy handed movements with no risk of collapse. Ideal for students. Tightening the turn in a thermal is easy with just the brake. At any angle of bank, a stronger pressure on the brake will increase roll, thus eliminating spin tendency.

A spiral can be entered from the first turn with more than 30cm of brake. Acceleration in the second turn can be reduced by easing off the brake.

The Fides 2 offers light handling and efficiency in lift. The very flat profile is simple to use. In schools some time will have to be spent teaching a gentle inflation technique but it is worth it to train pilots. Later in cross-country flights this feather-weight lady will be great in lift. A bag weighing less than 6kg is foreseeable. The pleasure-safety combination is one of the most successful on the market. A great asset to introduce SKY into schools.