

Lead and Follow

If you want your cross-country skills improved then why not do some lead and follow with your club coach. They can either fly two seat or alternatively lead and follow. I personally prefer the latter, it is surprising what can be seen viewing another glider from close quarters.

It is important to be aware of the rules when flying lead and follow, as getting it wrong can lead to much frustration and little learning. Getting it right can be good fun and much knowledge gained. Firstly agree what frequency you will be on at the time of launch this will normally be CTAF or 126.7 but you may want to switch as soon as possible to get of CTAF. There are a number of frequencies we can use, I don't suggest 122.7 there are too many people on this, we have, 122.5 122.9 118.625 119.825 120.175 118.025 and 122.025.

The first art is to get in contact with the coach at the start, it would be normal that the coach would launch first enabling him to check the conditions, and watch the student launch. If the reverse takes place don't go to the far ends of the earth looking for a thermal, try to keep close to the airfield. Considerable time can be wasted looking for each other. Once contact has been made keep in the same thermal allowing the lower glider to catch up with the higher glider, don't go looking for something better.

Once you decide to leave cross-country it is vital that on leaving the first and every other thermal from then on to make a radio call that goes something like this.

Leading glider. "Going, 70 knots"

Following glider "Following."

It is vital that confirmation is made, as the leading glider has no idea you are following. Do not try to make an extra turn, the very reason the coach has left is because he believes it is time to go, try to learn why. If you leave it too late then you will soon lose visual contact, in addition to not following in the same air as the coach, on streeting days this is vital.

If you are losing height on the glide then let the coach know, it may be the case that he will fly with the wheel down, or dump some water. Do not slow down to stay at the same height as the leader, you must fly the same speed.

Join the thermal so that you join on the opposite side of the circle, this is not only good etiquette but you can see what the coach is doing and the coach can see what you are doing. It is normally the case that if the coach is regularly gaining height on you he will pull the breaks and come down to you, try to work out why he gained, look at his gliders body language and try to learn from it. Above all in the thermal don't get in the double blind position, ie under the nose of the other glider where you can't see each other.

If the coach makes a move to shift the thermal by straightening out then rolling back into the turn, do the same. If instead you do not make the shift you will end up turning just inside the coach and he will not be happy. If a student does this to me more than twice I will leave them, it is asking for a mid air.

The usual procedure in gliding is to keep the chat down, but when coaching the opposite is true. Can you imagine a teacher in class saying nothing? If you wonder why the coach did what he did ask. If you are a coach tell the student why you are doing what you are doing, and what you are thinking.

Above all if you are feeling uncomfortable about the height you are operating at let the coach know, tense pilots are not safe pilots.

James Cooper