To all Club CFI's

ACCIDENT TO PIK 20 NEAR THE KENT GLIDING CLUB, CHALLOCK

The following is a preliminary factual account of the accident to a Pik 20 B which occurred near the Kent Gliding Club, Challock, on Saturday 18 February, based upon an investigation conducted by Chris Heames, the BGA Senior Accident Investigator. As you will see, this event had the real potential to end with fatal consequences for two reasons.

History of the flight

The glider was rigged by the owner and taken to the launch point using his one man towing kit. It was his intention to fly on the ridge at Challock and follow it as far as Rochester if conditions permitted.

After getting airborne on a winch launch, the pilot was immediately aware of a lack of pitch control but, as the aircraft was stable and climbing well but fast, he elected to continue the launch. This terminated at about 800-900ft AGL and he found that he was in ridge lift. However, he could not control the glider’s speed and attitude so he decided to abandon the glider and use his parachute whilst he had sufficient height.

The canopy jettisoned cleanly and the pilot rolled over the cockpit side to avoid the tailplane, as he judged there was a real risk that he might collide with it. The parachute deployed without problem and the descent was unremarkable. The strong wind, however, made steering impossible and he ended up suspended by his parachute fairly high in the top of a stand of trees on the ridge. He was able to release himself without difficulty and descend to the ground.

After he abandoned the glider, it rolled inverted and descended ‘sycamore leaf’ style in a spiral. It hit the trees nose low but then rolled erect and finished tail low suspended some 10ft above the ground with each wing supported by a tree.

Wreckage examination

Although the wreckage was relatively inaccessible, the tail was sufficiently close to the ground to see that the hotelier connector to the elevator was not made. There was no evidence of damage or distortion thus it is reasonable to assume that it was not connected throughout the short flight.

Additional Information

The pilot was a conscientious individual who had developed a routine in rigging his glider which ensured that all necessary actions were complete. However, on this occasion it started raining as he was fitting the tailplane, so he sought cover. After the shower he continued his routine but forgot to make the elevator connection. Thus, his rigging routine was interrupted.

The pilot was wearing a relatively old parachute which he kept because it was comfortable. Demonstrably, it deployed successfully but he did not
This accident highlights how essential it is that all gliders subjected to a positive control check after rigging. In this case, the weather was a factor but a ‘rigging’ owner/pilot may also easily be distracted by, for example, other pilots engaging him/her in conversation. It is not a process in the gliding environment that is customarily subject to ‘dual inspection’ and often takes place at relatively remote locations on an airfield. The responsibility for rigging of privately owned gliders and assuring that they are fit for flight rests with the owner/pilot and, as such, relies upon their self-discipline. Therefore, this would seem to be a good opportunity to reinforce this message to all pilots in light of the fact that mis-rigging events continue to occur. A few ideas discussed recently by the Safety Sub-Committee that might help prevent mis-rigging are the provision of simple check lists (derived from the Flight manual), a ‘Do not disturb, DI/Rigging in progress’ placard located near the subject glider and requesting a dual inspection.

This letter is sent to you with the request that you bring it to the attention of all club members to re-emphasise the importance of not being distracted or interrupted during the glider rigging/DI process. Please also remind pilots of the important safety net that carrying out a positive control check before flight can provide.

Peter Claiden
Chairman
BGA Safety Sub-Committee

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