

I got off the ground quickly and smoothly, my technique becoming more polished after learning not to fight the initial tug of the rope quite so much. My landing was even better, my feet hitting the edge of the landing tarp, although I slipped backward on my butt onto the tarp for a different kind of spot landing.

Otto tried a third time to launch in his suprone harness, but the alteration he had made to his bridle routing made the handling uncomfortable and he again had to abort, although by election rather than uncommanded. Laura, tug pilot, was getting a bit rattled and Corey took her seat. The fourth time was a charm and Otto became the first known man on Earth (known in this patch of it, at least) to make a successful suprone harness aerotow! He did this on a Wills Wing Falcon glider, by the way. And his landing was commendable, as well, although not quite close enough to push the spot leader; me.

I got four flights this day and would have taken even more if not for deferring to two fledging aerotowers, Merle Louck and Karl Stubbsen. We need more aerotow-qualified pilots in this region if we are to make it worthwhile to have tugs.

After extensive briefings from Chad Koester (who said that the first step towards qualification was to give him lots of money), Laura, and Corey, and enough additional verbal inputs from the rest of us to confuse a train locomotive, these guys pulled off their first events without calamity and received hearty congratulations from all around.

I don't know how many flights, total, were made that day, but all that would, did fly. I made another landing within 8 paces of the tarp and closed the day in first and second place in the informal spot-landing contest.

Dinner that night for a group of us dined courtesy of Carlos, local mechanical genius who also does a great job of working fish and vegetables in his own gas-fired invention. Brad, as usual, regaled us all with tales about his pet rooster, Mr. McNuggets, and other various exaggerations. It was a great day indeed, for all of us.

Sunday wasn't quite as ideal as the day before, the gentle breeze being considerably lighter and more south. Chad got out his Condor for everyone to play with. This 330 square foot monster is unwieldy, but capable of lifting a person off the ground in very light winds. It serves a training purpose, but flying it would be a chore. We tried to soar off the low sandbank previously mentioned, but the wind was too light and too cross. Chad later hooked his bungee cord to it and several of the non-flying types in the group

experienced their first sustained feet-off-the-ground moments; this is a great way to give introductions to hang gliding.

The wind improved by the time the tug crew was ready to fly and we set to another day's flying. As Corey said, "The usual suspects: Gary, Otto, and Todd. Otto, giddy with success from his previous test piloting, set about to try a different bridle and release on the suprone harness. This bicycle brake grip (Wallaby) release with two-point attachment to the harness and one to the carabiner, didn't prove out so well. He made some valiant takeoff attempts, running Fred Flintstone style, glider nose too much down, but didn't get off the ground before Corey released him from the tug end. On another attempt they both released when he nosed too high, forgot his normally excellent abort technique, then literally augured in to break both down tubes. He was close enough to the spot landing tarp to make it look like a valiant attempt for that prize, but glider abuse disqualified him. (There will be a more detailed report issued on his exploits from the press soon: stay tuned.)

Brad, who hadn't flown a hang glider in two years, made a foot-launch aerotow takeoff that scared the bejesus out of all of us, but he pulled it off. Somehow, he had been pulled upwards, towards the keel and ahead of the downtubes, making it extremely difficult to control while under tow. He returned to normal control, once released at 2500 feet. (You are sure to hear more on this topic as well.) Todd, valiantly trying to ace me out on the spot landing, did just that and landed on the edge of the tarp, but with more style than I, so I gladly conceded to him being the Spot King for the weekend.

As the day went on, the tide came in, and the landing area diminished, growing ever smaller with each passing minute. To land on the spot, an approach had to be made over water. I entertained everyone with my first ever water landing, properly executed but probably forty paces short of the mark. On my next landing I stretched the flight beyond a good flare point and whacked, closer to the spot, without hitting the water. The water was only ankle deep, in any case, so it was all in good fun. The encroaching tide made it a practical decision to terminate operations and we quit in mid-afternoon, immensely satisfied with another glorious flyer's holiday in El Gulfo. Again, it was proven that even the most valiant of efforts, even to drive all the way from Ohio, are rewarded with the great camaraderie and atmosphere these events offer. I counted about 25 participants: pilots, support crew, observers, hangers-on, beach decorations in bikinis, etc..

Heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Corey and Laura for their valiant efforts that make this all possible. It couldn't be done without them.

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