

FLYING AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR AS A TEAM ?

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Summary:

This subject has been discussed for years and you could say there are two schools of thought: there are the individualists (John Coutts, Andy Davis, Karl Striedeck, Janus Centka, Wolfgang Janovich, to name a few) and there are those who favor pair flying; its theorization and systematic application were first advanced by the Poles, then by the French and almost always, also the German teams.

The German team victory in the Standard Class at the 1994 Europeans held in Rieti has become the stuff of legend, with three German pilots (Schramme, Ziegler and Fischer) climbing onto the top step of the podium with equal points.

Undoubtedly, both choices offer advantages and disadvantages and it will be the pilots' own inclination, the skill and conviction of the trainer, the availability of a large pool of high-level pilots to learn from and yet other reasons that will help evaluate the opportunities and opt for one or the other.

PAIR FLYING

For a number of years, especially in international competition, the use of pair flying has been spreading among some nations who knew how to exploit it to obtain great results. The French and German Teams, in particular, have gained much of their success by depending not only on the quality of their pilots but also on lots of practice and determination in using this opportunity offered by the regulations.

Yes, by the regulations, because even though International Competitions currently aim to reward the best individual pilot, in actual fact, the pilot who knew best how to use the advantages of collaboration with a team companion (or companions) has often prevailed. In effect, gliding is one of the few individual sports in which collaboration between two athletes, or indeed a whole team, can have a determining influence on the result: think, for example, of cycling or motor sport. All the same, we think we can say that in gliding, the advantage can sometimes surpass the actual superiority of the pilot. Think of a difficult scrape round at low altitude in which one of the two pilots identifies the life-saving thermal or of the possibility of one of them going exploring to the advantage of the other.

In the past, there was the additional-advantage of helping and checking each other with the navigation, an advantage which has fallen by the wayside with the advent of GPS instrumentation.

In competitive gliding, there is never a moment when the leader of the pair can profitably say: "I've used the help of my pal and now leave him behind heading for the finish line alone". It would be a tactical error, apart from being an impracticably foolish ambition. It would be possible for a mountain cycling specialist who has let the team pull him up but then, on the uphill stretch, shows who is really the strongest.

This said, let's examine the characteristics of pair flying in more detail so as to be

able to benefit, at least as long as the regulations allow.



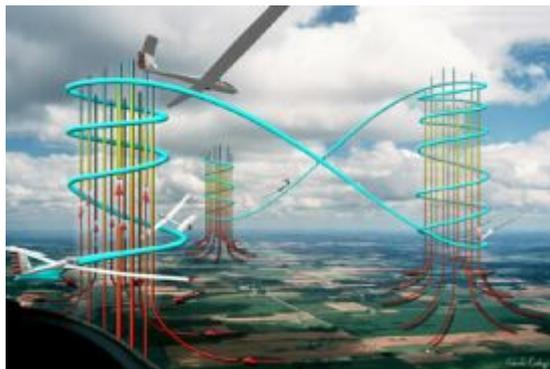
- **Why and when it is useful to fly as a pair**

Strong points

- Back-up in choosing and better evaluation.
- Less stressful decision making, and increase in determination.
- Less time spent centering and better choice of lift.
- Greater probability of locating the lift-bearing bands with the aim of maximizing the glide.
- An additional vario and 50m extra wing span (considering the minimum lateral space between the two gliders).
- Reduced risk of outlanding; in case of difficulty, almost never landing out.
- Four eyes see better than two.
- Generally, less nervous energy expenditure than flying alone because there are moments when the companion takes the initiative.

Weak points

- It is a strong psychological tie that excludes instinctive choice.
- It is a technical disadvantage if they don't get on well together/are not mentally in tune.
- Tends to be interpreted as resulting in less risky, but not necessarily better, decisions; could therefore reduce aggressive flying and sometimes even concentration.
- Character predisposed to shared decision-making.



- **What do you need to pair fly successfully**

- The capacity to take turns in leadership.
- Intense and continual practice. At least 200 hours together, including two-seater flying, taking turns in the front seat.
- Having identical gliders and instrumentation.
- Being capable of adopting a so-called "elastic technique".
- Believing and flying firmly (and that isn't easy) with the object that either can be the winner.
- The ability to rejoice in the other's success even after you have personally blown it.
- A trainer who knows how to appreciate, evaluate and be convincing about all this.
- The ability to communicate your own thoughts, providing your intentions to your companion in plenty of time.

Some of these characteristics are attitudinal and it is difficult to acquire them, many can be built up, followed and practiced with excellent results.

Especially where it is a question of technique, it is sufficient to work at it to gain, for example, the ability to practice elasticity. It sometimes happens that, even without wanting to, the duo becomes separated and one of them will be forced to be the follower. To get back together without forcing the leader to slow down, it is usually best to speed up the pace of the follower. To do this, it is necessary that:

- the follower flies the glide at a higher average speed than the other, using an adequate exchange of information about the speeds adopted. This doesn't mean flying faster than MC, but it does mean knowing how to make the most of advance knowledge about expected values for flying at optimal MC:
- the one in front gives the best average climb and position wherever centering in lift
- if out of visual contact, use certain software functions available in many navigation systems (e.g. TEAM function).



Pair flying implies totally giving up autonomous decision-making.

There are many errors to avoid:

Typically, one is taking a decisions without warning your companion soon enough

An error that should not be repeated, and which can prejudice the success of a pair flight right from departure, is one which leads to the separation and diversification of the

flight path. Imagine that two gliders enter lift and that, due to causes which can never really be ascertained, one of the two connects badly with the thermal.

If the pilot left below gets upset, refusing to accept the companion's better climb, he might be tempted to go off looking for another climb. It is clear that he will be searching by looking towards a point from the prospective of being fairly low; this will obviously limit the choices. The companion who was able to climb right to the top will have a much better view, giving more alternatives as to the route to follow and will probably make a far better choice. This can result in the pair becoming permanently separated.

The right thing to do is, instead, to accept the height separation, as long as it is not enormous and for both to work at rejoining the same course, working at the same heights even if not at the same time.

An effective interpretation of pair flying presupposes that the pilots abandon instinctive decision-making and become used to giving a rational guise to each decision. At the same time, this forces the pilots to raise their level of attentive sky observation and to pose questions of themselves that may prove very valuable if sufficient results are achieved. In other words, they need to evolve a vision of critical analysis in every situation and every alternative to face it/them with the companion, without jeopardizing the rapidity of decision-making.

In this respect, we could create the aphorism that the secret of good pair flying is managing to "*think out loud*", or present one's own thoughts vocally as if alone, rather than creating the thoughts by interrogating the partner. It is the decision, not the thought, that must be built up with the partner, because otherwise, there is a risk of surrendering part of one's own observational and evaluative powers or influencing the partner too much. Finally, to be successful in pair flying, the coach needs to have obtained a response from the whole clan to the question:

is it more important to have two team pilots on the podium rather than just one winner?

If the answer "YES" can be given with absolute conviction, and the whole team, including the helpers, the friends back home, the national directorship, the journalists who will comment on -he results, have all shown a consensus in this choice, then real pair flying can be constructed. Substantially, it should be clear that the whole country has to agree before the individual, that victory or a placing represent a gratification for all the others before the protagonist. If they have wrapped themselves up in the mission and refused all temptation towards divisiveness, then constructive work is possible.

This conviction will give even greater gratification to any victor because that victory is everyone's victory, prompting neither envy nor particular admiration but rather gratitude. Everyone feels that they have contributed and everyone feels legitimately stronger for having been part of a strong team.



"You either centre first try or you land! At the pre-European Championships in Finland, in 1995, I am pair flying with Leo. During a speed task, coming out of cumulus zone, we find ourselves having to cross a vast zone of blue sky originating from the fast passage of a line of instability that had generated slight precipitation. The blue zone was emitting non-thermic signals caused by the ground having recently cooled down. We climb under the last available cumulus and start the glide. But at 400m, we find the air starting to boil; lift is practically non-existent and the situation is made worse by having the wind against us. We have to aim for the wood down there which is beginning to set off little tiny, intermittent puffs of condensation that are born and quickly die. This is enough to prove that there is energy there. We know we shall arrive literally at our limits. We know we shall not be above 200m. but knowing there are two of us is comforting in the choice made almost instinctively, without even needing to talk about it. A decision born out of profound knowledge of the thought and technical/tactical behavior of the other. We are over the wood: it is bubbling but it is early!" (Ricky).⁽¹⁾

"We have to go almost to the end of the wood where there is a glade among the trees. We know the phenomenon well (it is common in Finland); dry glade among the trees.. .that is where it all starts from. The only words are:<if it isn't there, I'll land on the field at 60° to the nose now>, said by me. We also know the technique. As soon as there is a bubble...: open out, one to the right, the other to the left. When we arrive at the glade, in fact, there will only be time for one turn. While we are gliding, we are comforted once more by the cumulus that is being ignited. We are at the point, we can feel the air boil...<left>, say I, <right>, says Leo. Coming around to face Leo at the end of the first turn, I see that he is higher. My turn was not, in fact, positive...! immediately enter his spiral, and it is immediately a full 1.5! We climb up to 1900m. Exploiting the synergy of pair flying has substantially allowed us to never interrupt the competition rhythm. This daring glide has meant us not suffering even one moment of real crisis. The temptation to make another 100/1200m to arrive at safer heights at the connecting points might have surfaced. The determined continuous and daring glide and the possibility of immediately finding the lift were possible only thanks to the comfort of there being two of us" (Ricky).⁽¹⁾

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