

The Flocker – October 2007



"If you haven't tried these things you should, These things are fun and fun is good!"

Dr. Seuss



Steve Ford cranking it up over the Williams LZ

A Successful Flight Begins with a Successfully Timed Launch!

A Good Piece of Advice from RMHPA Flight Director Jim Yocom

Have you experienced the frustration of watching a pilot sky out above launch and then sinking out to the LZ when you take off only a minute later? Worse yet is sinking out and watching the next 10 pilots launch and effortlessly soar! What devious spell have they cast? To what powers have they sold their soul? Take heart, the situation is not hopeless! You too can learn the secrets to launching at the right time!

Like most skills, learning when to launch and how to climb out after launch is based on our experiences. We repeat successful patterns and discard unsuccessful ones. Experiences can also be had through observation. One of the easiest and most common ways to determine when to launch is to watch other pilots. This method is simple and sometimes successful, but has serious shortcomings. The most obvious problem is what to do when there are no other pilots nearby! Watching birds for clues is also helpful, but suffers from the same limitation. It is good to use other soaring pilots and birds, but try to determine why they are able at that moment to soar.

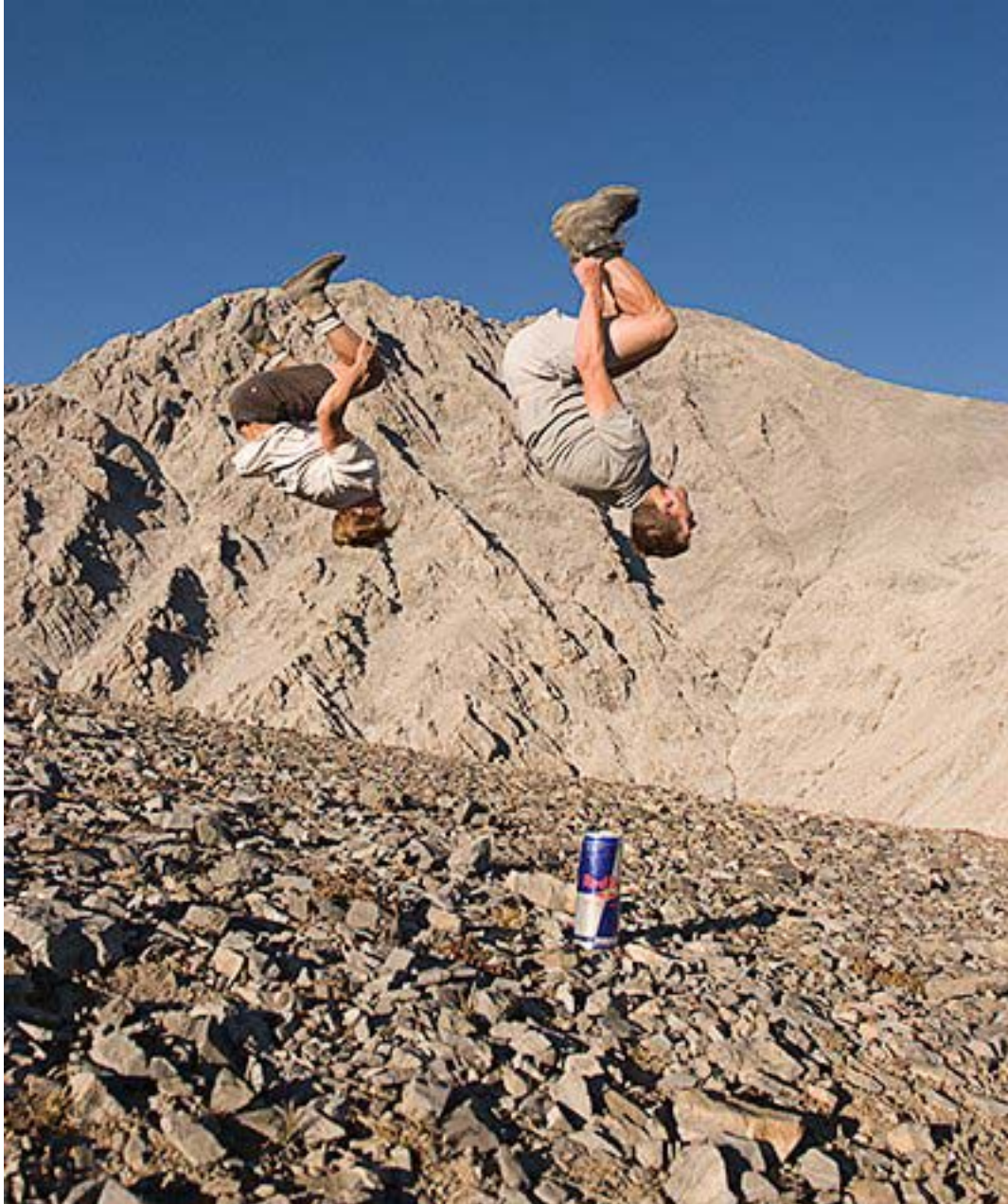
I find that taking time to observe the thermal cycles on launch before flying is one of the best methods to prepare for a successful flight. Take note of the wind speed and direction. Is it within the limits of your ability? If so, is there a possibility of ridge soaring? Ridge soaring is a nice way to stay in the air while waiting for a good thermal to blow through. A site like our own Mt. Zion (Lookout Mountain) has very limited ridge soaring opportunities. The south bowl is somewhat soarable in SE winds and the north canyon can be soared in northerly winds. If the wind is blowing in directions conducive to flying in these areas, you should consider going there after launching to maximize the time you have to find a thermal.

Before launching, be sure to observe the direction, duration, size and strength of the thermal cycles. Pick out streamers, trees, shrubs, even grass below launch to watch thermals as they travel up the slope. The direction the thermal comes from is important because you should turn into the rising air of the thermal after launching. Turning into the sink will result in sinking out! The duration of the thermal is important in order to gauge when to launch and effectively use the thermal. I often time the length of the thermal and the interval between thermals. This gives me an idea of when the next thermal will arrive on launch and how numerous the thermals will be once I am in the air. If there is a long wait between thermals, I know it will be important to launch and stay with that first thermal. Gauging the size of the thermals tells me whether they are workable. Look for common movement of trees, shrubs, and grass in an area to determine thermal size. The strength of the thermals can be estimated several ways. Notice the gust factor when the thermal passes. How much did the wind speed change? If the wind on launch is 10mph and goes completely calm just before a thermal arrives, then gusts to 20mph in the thermal and you have trouble controlling your glider on the ground, you can be reasonably sure the thermals are strong and will have sharp edges. Thermals that do not completely block the wind before coming through launch and only increase the wind speed a few miles per hour are likely to be more benign and have smoother edges.



So you have watched the cycles and determined the conditions are within your level of competency. How do you determine the precise moment to launch? In thermic conditions, the best scenario is to launch into a useable thermal and ride it high into the sky! Be sure to pre-flight and prepare your equipment before launching. Position yourself on launch and wait for the current thermal cycle (if any) to end. This means

recognizing the life cycle of the thermal. As a common column thermal approaches launch, it often causes at least a slight decrease in wind speed, and/or a relatively erratic wind direction. Column thermals are massive creatures. Literally tons of air mass is being lifted skyward in a rotation. Think of the dust devils you have seen. They are literally tiny, violent thermals. The mass of a rotating thermal can actually block the prevailing wind or at least disrupt its smooth flow. This is your first sign that a thermal is arriving. Look down the slope for streamers, grass, shrubs and trees that indicate wind speed and direction. If you look carefully, you can literally see the thermal coming up the hill. If the thermal seems to be of a workable size, your goal will be to launch into the front edge of the thermal. If you have walked to launch and a cycle seems to just be starting, be careful! Is it the beginning or the end of the thermal? This is often difficult to determine and I suggest



Honza and Andy doing synchronized back flips on Mt. Borah, ID



Scotty Marion looking back at a gaggle near Annecy

waiting for the thermal to pass and another cycle to begin. The signs that a cycle is ending include the air becoming less gusty, smoother and even a little cooler. If in doubt, wait!

You have pre-flighted your equipment, are on launch, have watched the cycles, and feel confident a workable sized thermal is coming up the hill. Wait for the wind to be launchable, and visualize the thermal rising upward as it climbs up the slope. Execute a safe launch and fly into the thermal, keeping a good maneuvering airspeed. At this point, if I have indeed hit lift, I like to fly outward from the hill to explore the size of the thermal. I keep an eye on the hill and if the thermal is big enough to make a safe 360-degree turn, I make that turn in the lift. Do not be concerned initially with centering in the lift, it is better to over-bank your turn and stay in the thermal (and avoid the hill), than to worry about finding the best core and bank angle. I repeat this pattern until I climb above the hill to a height where I am no longer concerned with impacting the slope. Then I can freely work on maximizing the climb. If I cannot safely make a 360-degree turn in the lift, I make a 90-degree turn and then S turn back and forth in the lift, being careful not to be pushed back into the hillside by the thermal. While near any hillside, maintain good maneuvering airspeed in case you need to make an abrupt turn to avoid the ground!

Over time you will sharpen your ability to predict thermal activity from launch and hone your flying skills to be able to effectively use that launch thermal to successfully propel yourself skyward!

In case you missed it, Jim Yocom also has a good report from the 2007 Florida competitions here: <http://www.rmhpa.org/xcontest/Florida2007/Florida2007.htm>

Ross Robinson lands at the old tennis bubble LZ in Steamboat Springs



PG Sponsorship Program

From RMHPA President BJ Herring

The new **PG Sponsorship Program** will officially kick off very soon. We're taking very deliberate steps to ensure it's a program that will get used without exception. That will be the key to its success. We have willing sponsors, and we'll always have people wanting to fly Lookout. Having you, our RMHPA members, spread the word that to fly Lookout, new pilots need to follow the "PG-RMHPA Sponsorship Program" will be a big, big help. In a month or so, when we kick it off, we'll have the documents on our website for easy reference by anyone wondering what it takes to fly Lookout. The basic requirements are similar to what's been required for years. To help our sponsor's keep track of a the sponsoree, we're requiring that the 10 sponsored flights for P3's and Local P2's be tracked and signed off by the sponsor after each flight. We've drafted a "PG-RMHPA Sponsorship Signoff" sheet that the sponsor/instructor will signoff as they work through the program. The very first signoff is a walk through of the LZ's and Launch. Using the Hang Glide Walk Through Syllabus as a template, we're coming up with a Paragliding

Syllabus that will give our sponsors a reference as they introduce the pilot to Lookout. A **special** thanks to Jim Yocom, Mark Windsheimer, and Steve Ford for letting us plagiarize their Hang Glide syllabus.

Anyone that provides their time as a sponsor should have free drinks at the local watering hole, if you ask me. They do a huge service for our community, and for saving lives. HUGE thanks to you all!

For easy reference, below is a snapshot of the agreed requirements.

LOCAL PILOTS:

All	Current RMHPA and USHPA Membership.
P2	Minimum of 60 flights
	Must have 15 spot landings within a 50 foot circle(Instructor Verified)
	Sponsored for a minimum of 10 flights
	Observer or Instructor must perform walk through and sponsor the 1 st flight for P2's.
	USHPA recommended operating limitations also apply
P3	Observer/Sponsor walk through with site briefing
	Sponsored for a minimum of 10 flights
P4	Observer/Sponsor walk through with site briefing

VISITING PILOTS:

All	*Current RMHPA and USHPA Membership.
P2	MINIMUM OF P3 RATING TO FLY LOOKOUT
P3	Walk through with site briefing
	Sponsored for a minimum of 10 flights
P4	Observer/Sponsor walk through with site briefing

Status of the Newsletter

The newsletter is in shambles, and I blame you for it, even if it is my fault. There's been a lot of good soaring, amazing flights, a lot of accidents (!), everybody has new equipment, &c. But nobody writes about these things for the newsletter. So I went ahead and got together some fun things to make the newsletter interesting – crazy stories, pictures of naked women flying gliders, insulting equipment reviews, &c. – but that all got censored and subverted. You still didn't send me anything, and you didn't like what I worked out on my own, so I said fuck it, and this, I think you must concur, is exactly what I did.

But now Jim Yocom came up with a nice piece, and Steve Ford sent his fantastic photograph, and BJ wrote about the new rules at Lookout, so there was enough to put out this attempt at a newsletter. I hope you enjoyed it.