

# *attitude* Less is more!

Kelly Farina, former-British team member and XC and thermalling course leader

Over the last 15 years of flying paragliders it seemed that I was always chasing higher performance. It also seemed that I was using all my newly-acquired skill to fly these hotter and hotter wings. Many articles have been penned about the merits of 'dropping down' certification classes to have an easier time and make flying more enjoyable. However few of them explain why we need the extra performance in the first place.

We believe more performance will enable us to fly further and faster. It sometimes works out, but we still seem to be making the same mistakes. And a lot of our mental capacity is being used to control the wing rather than concentrate on the chess game we are playing. In short we are compensating for our shortcomings with the extra performance. We are just using it to dig ourselves out of mistakes we are making.

So, in theory, the less mistakes you make the less performance you need. I justify this by adding that common mistakes I've made are usually in big air, when part of my brain is controlling the wing. When your head is not free it's hard to concentrate on correct lines, clouds and terrain. I've been guilty of using the extra performance to help me search for climbs when I was searching in wrong place. And of using it to get me out of lee-sides I've found myself in - quite scary on a high-performance wing.

In the early days I got sucked into clouds a few times because I was 'under fire' in rough air and unable to clearly think my way out. And I struggled in broken lift while not seeing that 200m away a pilot or a bird was rocketing out. These are common mistakes that will sound familiar to many pilots.

As our skill grows our ability to control these higher-performance wings also increases. Imagine what would happen if, using our highly-tuned technique and understanding, we no longer made these common mistakes. Do we still need the extra performance? I argue that we do not.

One of the hardest things to achieve in XC flying is the ability to sniff out the good line. These lines over the terrain, when used correctly, actually equate to a greater increase in performance than flying a comp wing in bad air - every time. And confidently gliding to the actual trigger point and not wasting time and height searching will increase your average speed. Using clouds and cloud-suck efficiently on glides will help pilots crack on and leave the pack behind. And finally, not gliding into sinky, rough lee-sides will save time and nerves.


So the more skill you possess the less performance you actually need. I put forward the proposition that less is definitely more. Put it another way: less performance equates to more fun.

During ten years of competition flying I served my apprenticeship and flew hotter and hotter protos... until in 2007 I had one that was way too hot for me. I had a million excuses. But mainly it was because, after a nasty high-speed blow-out close to the deck on final glide, and an insane cascade close to terrain at the Czech open, I was scared.

I realised I just wasn't prepared to risk my life for a trophy and kudos from my friends any more. I'd seen at first hand the abysmal safety record of the comp scene, where 10 - 15% of pilots throwing their reserves or falling down without it is quite acceptable. I changed comp wings to my current Axis Mercury and it made a big difference.

Fast forward to 2009. I started using an EN B wing for guiding and free flying. Not only was it way easier to keep an eye on my group of pilots, it was also easier for them to stay with me. And they could see that it wasn't the glider but the pilot, giving them a realistic target to aim towards.

So now I've gone full circle and I may not fly comp wings any more. Not only am I less scared, but I've never enjoyed paragliding so much. It seems easier, and this gives my head more time to think about lifty lines, the next trigger and, most important, staying out of dangerous lee-sides down low. Avoiding these dangers is half the battle.

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a blue t-shirt, looking intently at a large, unfolded map. The map is held in front of him, and a red object, possibly a bag or part of a vehicle, is visible in the foreground. The background shows a vast, mountainous landscape under a clear blue sky. The man's sunglasses reflect the surrounding environment.

Being able to get as close in to the terrain as needed, knowing that nothing nasty will come out of the blue helps immensely. The huge increase in confidence has resulted in me being able to crack on like I was on a twitchy racing snake, although I admit that against strong pilots on comp wings I'd be left for dead if racing.

So ask yourself: You may have the skill to jump up to a hot wing, but will you make the same mistakes? If so you're just swapping knowledge for performance. Just remember that the more you understand, the less performance you need. In my humble opinion, less is more, for sure. Stay safe and have fun out there.