

THE NEW AIRBORNE STING 3

Stuart Coad

A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO I WAS STANDING ON LAUNCH WATCHING THE FLYING, LOITERING IS PROBABLY A MORE ACCURATE WORD, AS I WAS HANGING AROUND HOPING TO BORROW A GLIDER. I HAD MY MIND SET TO FLY ONE PARTICULAR GLIDER, THE NEW STING 3 168. I WANTED TO SEE IF IT'S AS GOOD AS ITS SMALLER BROTHER/SISTER, THE 154.

There it was, Shane was flying it, and he was smiling, that's always a good sign, when you can see a pilot who's been flying for years, grinning while flying.

The hill we were standing on is good for top landings and eventually Shane did exactly that, making it look comfortable and easy. He said, "Would you like a go?" "Would I!"

This launch is low, around 80ft, and the wind was light, around 10kt, Adam standing next to his C4 asked, "What do you reckon, will we get up?" I said, "I think it's worth a shot." Harry, who was setting up his Sting II, agreed.

I hooked my harness in, conducted a pre-flight, climbed in, did a hang-check and picked up the glider.

Static balance was good as it sat on my shoulders, not trying to turn its nose up or down. I lifted the glider up to find the angle of attack and was pleasantly surprised how light it is, especially compared to a topless!

I could feel the glider rocking on my arms slightly while I was getting a feel for it.

I find some gliders feel quite stiff before you even launch, this one felt like it would do what I asked it to, when I asked it.

The wind had dropped and it was looking quite iffy, but I'd decided to launch regardless of whether it was going to remain soarable. Launching and landing is as much fun as it has been since my first low glide.

I distinctly remember launching this glider: As I commenced my run, it lifted cleanly as my body went forward and my strides became longer and the hang strap tightened. With three more steps I had excess airspeed and was smoothly carried off the hill. I put in my first turn input and the glider responded without hesitation, and I found myself slowly climbing. Excellent!

Two more passes and I was level with the houses on the ridgeline and I was soaring. I pulled the VG on half and eventually all the way on. The basebar came back nicely and the bar pressure reduced, but not too much, I thought to myself, "This'll be fun to

Sting 168 fly-by

Photo: Scott Barrett

fly fast, especially aerotowing." With the VG on full, the glider remained quite steerable, but with a bit more delay before responding to weightshift and, like all gliders with VG, it doesn't respond very quickly when cross-controlling, but if you cross-control, then you shouldn't be contemplating this glider.

I wasn't sinking out, so I decided to go on glide and see if I could make it to a larger hill about a kilometre away. I left at 100ft floating along over low dunes at best glide with full VG, knowing I could pop it on the beach if I started sinking out. Normally I wouldn't attempt this glide from less than 160ft, but what the heck, I had nothing to lose. I had about 700m to glide before the hill would rise enough to allow me to sustain height. I expected to lose about 70ft, and so I didn't really think I'd make it, but I did! Comfortably! As I kept on and got up I looked back behind me, Harry had launched, hadn't been so lucky and was setting up for a landing, and I was now climbing easily up to join Adam up high. Yeehaa, this is a good glider!

Time to find out more about it. Flying at minimum sink I found I could climb up to join the topless gliders, it still steered well at very slow and the bar pressure was good, pushing back at me, but not too much – so it was hard to accidentally stall the glider.

It felt comfortable scratching in close to the hill and you could slow it right down in the thin lift surges, so climbing was quite easy in light conditions. However, when it does stall flying slow in a turn, it'll certainly drop



Photo: Alan Daniels

a wing and turn you while recovering airspeed. Stalling from straight and level is straightforward with no sharp diving and smooth recovery of air-speed without much height loss, as is stalling from trim in a turn.

I think it'll thermal real well, there were little bubbles coming through that you could grab a couple of circles in. When I attempted this, I could stick a wing in a bubble and then, once in the thermal, the glider didn't wind in.

Mucking about like this, I found I'd gained all this height. Well, time to see if it spins. I think a true intermediate glider should be able to be spun, but it shouldn't be easy to get to spin. Okay, height's good, sky's clear, I set myself up and it took me two or three goes to get the glider to spin properly. Then, once it was spinning, it degraded into a diving turn appropriately and timing the exits from the spins and spirals was comfortable. Excellent! There'll be a lot of fun to be had on this model!

How about fast fast glides? I gained height again and went on some high glides to and from the little hill I'd taken off from. The bar comes back progressively as the rope comes on, and you can feel the glider speed up. As you look out to the tips, the trailing edge doesn't flutter noticeably until you're going 'stuff-the-bar-silly' fast.

What about losing all this energy? As the bar is let back to trim and the VG let off, the glider does feel like it keeps its speed longer than its predecessor, a good thing to remember on final.

Steering at full-tight requires body co-ordination, but it still turns like a Sting and feels about in the middle between a Fun and a C4.

What about top-landing this

glider? There's a very nice grassy area on the larger hill so I thought I'd find out.

The Sting 3 154 keeps its energy and so has a longer final than the Sting II, has a very progressive stall with no sudden break, but doesn't try and drop a wing. I found the Sting 3 168 to be the same. After a couple of high passes to check the strength, I set up an approach for top landing. I came in at cross, slightly tailwind and executed a clean upslope flare landing. Nice, confidence-inspiring in fact.

All too soon it was time to return the glider, I launched again and flew back down to the smaller hill where Shane was waiting. That hill was crowded and there was a field nearby so instead of trying another top landing I thought I'd see how it lands on the flat.

I made a right-hand circuit over the field and went into hang at about 100ft. The glider is comfortable to fly by the uprights and felt reassuring at best glide as we came through the bumps of the gradient. On short final the glider did indeed go for a longer skim across the ground while I slowed to trim. The glider still felt comfortable and stays at trim for quite a while too. I flared with a smooth action in little to no wind and the glider rotated well, coming to a complete stop with no steps!

This is a very good glider with quite similar handling to the Sting 3 154. I consider it a true intermediate glider that will suit those with more than 100 hours and are considering stepping up. Just as importantly, I think it'll be great for those who are tired of carrying that glider that is a little too heavy, has too many battens and seems to take forever to set up. A great glider for inland or the coast.



Photo: Scott Barrett

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