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contributed by Jill McCaw

What Power Pilots could learn from Gliding

I'M A glider pilot and I fly for fun. I'm a bit of a geek I guess and I get a kick out of knowing things that other people don't. The really obvious one is that I understand (as much as anyone does) how a wing flies and what keeps aircraft in the air. Following on from that is the idea that air is a fluid and moving further we get fluid dynamics on a planetary scale, in other words meteorology. I love that I can look at the sky and tell what the weather will do, for at least the rest of the day, and if I've sneaked a peak at the weather map earlier, I can make fairly accurate predictions for several days. Glider pilots get really good at reading the atmosphere, from the very basic need to look for trigger points for thermals to an understanding of how the afternoon sea breeze will wipe out lift in some areas faster than others.

It always surprises me that other pilots don't know this stuff too. Glider pilots love our sport. It is such a wonderful thing to do, so exhilarating, challenging and just down right fun that we can't understand why the whole world isn't doing it with us. The selling points, when we talk to other people, are all about the joys and beauty of powerless flight, the thrill of being in the air. That's fine for people who have never had anything to do with aviation, but most of the readers of this column are already pilots. What can I say that will make you think it's worth your while to have a go at gliding?

Have you thought about what you could learn by learning gliding, things that would make you a better power pilot?

I talked to some power pilots who are also glider pilots and asked them what gliding has taught them that has improved their general aviation knowledge, and their flying ability. Penny Mackay from Dragon Flight Training and Nelson Aviation College started her aviation career as a glider pilot, moving into power flying and ultimately flight training. Gliding taught her good situational awareness. Glider pilots are taught to fly with their heads outside the cockpit and to always be aware of other gliders sharing their sky, particularly in thermals or flying in the rising air along ridge lines. Traveling at 100 knots along a ridge you really have to be very very aware of other traffic, especially as it may be on a reciprocal course to you.

Penny says she learnt to judge a glide by angles, something that has been useful for forced landings in power planes. She also learnt about landing in rough strips and paddocks. She has much more awareness of performance.

I thought Penny was joking when she brought up the next point, but she was serious. Gliding, she says, teaches you to use your feet when flying. I'm not a power pilot. I never knew power pilots barely need to touch the rudder. We have to rudder in every turn. She also says she'd never have known what a steep turn really is. Gliders regularly fly in steep turns with up to 60° of bank so as to stay in the core of rising air in 'tight' thermals.

Yvonne Loader, was the other way around from Penny. She was a successful competition power pilot with her favourite being the forced landing event. When she discovered gliding she already had a real advantage with 'no go around' landings. Yvonne went on to gain an FAI Gliding world record for feminine gain of height and is active as both a gliding instructor and tow pilot. Gliding, she says, has taught her to know what is happening with air currents especially in the mountains, to be able to 'read' and avoid turbulence (most power pilots just crash through it rather than deviating around it a little), and riding the smooth wave rather than flying in the rough air, especially prevalent in the lee of the Kaikouras or any mountain range in a westerly, as most power pilots do.

Yvonne says power pilots are in awe of our soaring knowledge and would love to have our knowledge about the air currents and where to fly to avoid turbulence. They can't get enough of her explaining what is happening 'in the air' and what the clouds are telling us. During a forced landing during a (power) BFR Yvonne realised that she had no penetration and quickly nominated a higher speed and pushed the nose down to get into the paddock (a



Power Pilots can benefit from gliding knowledge too. This Cessna is cruising in the lift along the Springfield ridge with gliders from the Canterbury Gliding Club.

westerly was pushing through the gorge area). The instructor made the comment that he was most impressed she had recognised what was happening as most power pilots would not have reacted to the situation!

We are better at short landings too, Yvonne says, and the higher winds or cross winds don't bother us as much as other power pilots. She thinks we are also more aware of looking out constantly and good airmanship as our standard of flying is high.

Penny says gliding gave her good discipline but most of all, gliding gave her a love of flying.

I'm Jill McCaw and I'm editor and publisher of SoaringNZ, the official journal of Gliding NZ. If you're interested in giving gliding a try for yourself, check out the details of your local club on the GNZ website. www.gliding.co.nz