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Launch Assistance. Should I Ask? Should I Offer?

How many of us can say they have never messed up a launch? Independence is generally a good thing in paragliding but modern wings are not optimised for launching in the strong winds we often get in Britain. There are certainly times when I appreciate a helping hand. There have also been times when I have asked for help and pilots on the hill have stood there looking blank with their hands in their pockets. I don't think are deliberately unhelpful, just not prepared or in the right mindset.

General Help

Anchoring a pilot by his harness is not a good idea. It restricts the pilots actions and carries several risks including accidentally becoming airborne. Fatalities have happened this way. However getting that awkward knot or cravat out or helping to get a wall started can make life a great deal easier for the pilot.

Grab A Wing Tip

Although there are other ways of stopping paragliders, grabbing a wing tip will stop any paraglider in almost any wind a sane person is likely to encounter on the hill as long as the pilot allows the glider to rotate across wind. The most effective way to do this is for one person to hold a wing tip low (almost on the ground) and move it upwind to take the tension out of the lines. Perhaps a light person might have difficulty stopping a large tandem, but a glider held down by one wing tip will not go far. If you cannot grab a wing tip the trailing edge will work but is a bit messier and less effective.

Do I Need Gloves?

Some pilots are understandably nervous of handling a paraglider without gloves on for fear of getting line burns. Modern paraglider lines are very thin and when trying to stop a glider by grabbing lines I have had them cut through gloves and burn me. Painful and expensive! A better approach is not to grab lines at all but to grab only the fabric of the glider. That way you don't have to worry about your hands or needing gloves.

Should I Ask For Help?

There you are. Rigged or partly rigged. The wind picks up and you are starting to have difficulty keeping the glider down. Of course you should ask. Why take a risk you don't need to?. Other pilots who are rigging may have missed the increasing wind and your request will draw their attention to it. Much better to ask than have to be mopped up as I once was.

Should I Offer Help?

Why not? Do you really know how good that pilot is at launching in strong winds? Increasingly, if I think a pilot might need help I move to his wing tip and may even hold it without his asking. He can always say "I'm OK. Leave it please." No good pilot will resent such concern for his safety. Another option, if you think a pilot might be dragged, is to

stand a some way downwind of his wing. If he starts to lose it you can let his wing wrap itself around you and stream downwind.

Keep Alert

Socialising on the hill is a big part of paragliding for many of us but sometimes we can get deeply into conversations and ignore our surroundings. We should always try and keep an eye on what is going on both in the air and on the ground.

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