

## First Flight Follies

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Looking back over the many years I've had the chance to start a soaring season, I well remember the goofy things I've observed (and probably done) during Clubs' first flight activity of the year. Be it January or June, it was usually apparent when someone was making their first flight in a while. Here are some things I've seen that should probably be avoided.

First, ground operations- a little pre-activity briefing, to include putting one person in charge is usually a good idea. Uncoiling the tow rope after winter storage can be amusing to watch but frustrating to do if not stored properly. When coiled around some kind of spool the task is easy; untangling knots and snares from a rope thrown on the hangar floor is not! Getting the ships out by banging wing tips into hangar beams, posts, door frames, or other gliders makes for a bad start. Be sure to have enough personnel to have pushers, pullers, and watchers available every step of the way. Towing or dragging gliders to the line does not go well with ropes that are too short to prevent a pivoting glider's wing from hitting the tow vehicle. Once at the flight line, trying to hook up a Schweizer glider with a Tost ring is a bad idea, although it can be done.

And now on to flight ops. Hopping aboard and strapping in before doing the preflight because you thought the other guy did it is not a good plan. You might be surprised by what crawls or slithers out from the floorboards. A bigger surprise will be yours if you didn't bother with a positive control check because you assumed all was well because the club ship you're about to fly was not disassembled during the winter, and in fact a vital piece was disconnected for maintenance.

Confusing the signal for taking up slack and commencing the tow can be exciting, but not in a good way. Going to full power in the tow plane before slack is taken out can be exhilarating, but not always survivable. How about the results of not completing the Before Takeoff checklist? By whatever acronym is used, launching with the canopy not secure, the trim not set, or the spoilers unlocked all have consequences, and none of them good. Recent accidents including fatalities have resulted from trying to fly with one hand on the open canopy, kiting while fighting incorrect trim, and trying to overcome the drag of open spoilers on tow. So, how do we keep all this foolishness from happening?

The most competent and practiced professional pilots in both the military and airlines undergo recurring refresher training, both in ground sessions and in flight, so why shouldn't we? After all, soaring is often seasonal, and coming back after a break can find us all pretty rusty. So, before going out to the gliderport, schedule some ground training for the entire club. Start by reviewing your ground procedures, and remind everyone of their part to play in all operations. Tow pilots should get together and discuss standard practices and signals, and share those with everyone. Individual pilots should meet with CFI's to review flight procedures, and be sure to include the use of onboard avionics, whether it be updating software, programming waypoints, or just reaffirming how to select frequencies on the radio. Trying that on tow is not the place to recognize the need!



Finally, the SSF strongly encourages everyone to make their first flight of the year with a CFI, regardless of when your season starts. You should also consider making this a WINGS flight activity. That's a good way to knock some of the rust off the basic flight maneuvers you need to practice. Combining those activities with good preflight preparation will go a long way toward eliminating the First Flight Follies.

