
Dune Soaring Tips

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Pre-flight

- The safest and easiest gliders for dune soaring are the single surface floaters like the Malibu. Double surface gliders like Sonics and XT's may be OK when the wind is stronger but in lighter winds and tight situations they will be harder to manoeuvre and certainly not recommended for first time dune soaring.
- The slope of the beach leading up to the dune has a big effect on the dune lift. A constant upward slope is good. If the slope before the dune is flat or downwards, it will reduce the lift significantly.
- Beach crowds - check out the beach. Make sure your possible flight path and landing is clear. Note any poles, garbage bins or signs that might get in your way. Check the tide level and whether it is coming in or out. Check for kite surfers and chat with them about your flight path.
- Dune care - dunes are easily damaged especially at the front edge. If the vegetation at your launch/ landing is looking worn, move to another section and give it a chance to regenerate. Have your club contact the local land care officer or council and offer assistance in dune care.
- Wind speeds of 20 knots and over are dangerous, one slip up can result in a serious accident. And anyway, it's not much fun in that strength and tends to get quite turbulent near the ground especially if there is big surf/swell.
- Many people use a separate harness for dune flying and it may not have a chute. Don't want to wreck your good harness with all the sand.
- Wear sunglasses or other protective eye wear. Dunes often have low bush which can cushion exuberant landings, but there can be sharp sticks that could ruin your day.
- Keep plenty of spare uprights.

Launch

- Dune soaring is an advanced skill that needs to be practiced. Start by just gliding off the dune and work from there. Don't think that it is a novice sport, it's easy to make this assumption given that it is low flying on sand dunes. Practise practise practise. Continuous learning is the key.

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- In windy conditions, ground handling is made easier by holding the base bar. It usually is windy for dune flying. BUT be careful not to carry this habit across to light wind launches and high performance gliders.
- Practice ground handling. Observe how the airflow over different bumps and gullies in the dune can suck you in or push you out.
- When launching, fly the glider first and worry about getting into the harness later. Do it the other way and you'll be on the deck. With practice the harness will become automatic. Fly the glider first.
- If your legs are dangling, keep them crossed. It helps keep your centre of mass under control and looks better too.
- Watch the water for wind changes; the gust you need to get launched can be seen coming on the water. Watch for impending direction changes.

Flying

- Experienced dune flying pilots can make it look really easy. If you are just starting, don't be fooled by their suave and smooth flying. It's a lot harder than it looks.
- Keep on a little extra airspeed, especially when close to the hill or ground. The speed gives extra control and the opportunity to land nicely if you need to. This is especially important when running downwind along the dune. If you need to land the extra speed will help you rotate the glider into wind as you flare.
- Keep flying, don't land! When flying close to the ground, it is a natural reaction to get ready to land. Practise will overcome this. With floater gliders you can stay in prone and fly them right into the deck. If there is wind, the nose tends not to pitch down due to the strong pitch postiveness of the gliders. This does NOT work for double surface gliders they're too slippery and will nose in.
- Concentration; pay attention the whole time. When flying so close to the ground, a split second lapse in concentration can do you in. You'll just have to ignore the genetically blessed people sunbathing on the beach.
- When the lift at the sight is marginal, it is most challenging and can be the most rewarding; however, the probability of an accident is increased as you fly closer to the dune. Keep a little airspeed up your speed sleeve.

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Landing

- To get out of the air quickly, pull the control bar in, the excess speed gained will dissipate quickly and you can brake with your feet in the sand. For example, if you find yourself in a situation where you are approaching the edge of the beach, heading towards water and with insufficient height to turn away; in this case pull the bar in and get onto the beach. Because floater gliders have such good low speed performance, slowing down would cause the glider to continue flying out over the water. (This is different to high performance gliders, whose glide performance does not deteriorate so much with speed and whose landing speed would be much higher.)
- Landed on the beach and having trouble walking back up the dune with the glider and all the wind? Try the “Ken technique”. (Who is Ken?) Move to the bottom of the dune with the glider pointing into wind. The wind will be pushing the tips up and nose down because the tips are near the slope. Standing in the control frame, turn and face the back of the glider, get the nose down low and then lift the glider on your shoulders. Keep the nose right down nearly touching the ground and the wind will push you up the dune. You can do this while still clipped in. Turn around and take off again!

Post Flight

- To make sure your equipment lasts as long as possible, wipe down the exposed wires and tubes before packing it up. If you are really dedicated give it a fresh water wash and thoroughly dry them when you get home. You might try polishing exposed tubes with car wax to create a barrier. You can also coat the inside of tubes with linseed oil. That’s a job for non flying days.
- Most of all, have fun!