
AEROTOWING

Normal procedures

By default aerotowing is from the main runway. However a separate aerotow launch-point is often operated from outside the club-house so that the trial members can be easily and safely escorted to the gliders. At times when a large number of aerotows are expected, usually on a good day, a separate 'grid' is set up (see below).

The launch starts by a helper collecting the tow-rope and attaching it to the glider. This helper then usually holds the wing-tip. By accepting the tow-rope, the pilot has signified that he/she is ready to launch. The launch is controlled by radio signals from the launch-point controller (LPC) to the tug pilot. The LPC gives the tug-pilot the name of the pilot who will be paying for the launch. Next the LPC radios for the tug to take up slack. After checking that the winch launch is not in progress, and checking that it is all clear above and behind, the LPC then radios "All out".

After take-off the glider should maintain a position about as high as the fin of the tug until it has also taken off. Do not fly higher than 20 feet until the tug has taken off. Thereafter the glider stays behind the tug just above the wake. The correct position is given by finding the wake and then moving slightly above it. Note the apparent distance between the canopy frame and the tug and maintain this distance. This is the most effective method of staying on station.

You must not attempt to steer the tug. If the frequency is clear, it is permissible to give the tug additional instructions during the tow.

Tap the panel near the altimeter during the climb. This will ensure that you release at your chosen height and not a hundred or so feet above it. Extra height will be charged for. The cost of the aerotow is based on the height reached not the time taken.

It is permissible to 'box the wake' of the tug, once a safe height has been reached. However do not go into the low tow position behind the Falke.

Gliders are only waved off in an emergency, or by prior arrangement with the tug pilot. At all other times the tug pilot will continue to climb until the glider pilot chooses to release. In the vicinity of Lasham, at 5,500 feet ASL you will probably be waved off to avoid climbing into controlled airspace.

The glider pilot must release immediately if he/she loses sight of the tug because of cloud, or if this is imminent.

After release a climbing turn should be done to either the left or right. The climbing turn is important. It ensures that the glider is clear of the cable and rings and it enables the tug pilot to see that the glider has released. If the tug pilot does not know the release height, you may be charged more than you thought.

Launch failure

Failures on aerotow launches are rare, but it is important that you consider your options as part of your pre-flight checks for eventualities. If the launch were to be aborted at the initial stage of the launch, it is often possible to land ahead within the airfield. Slightly higher up, it is not safe to

land ahead, and it is not safe to turn either. In this situation you will probably have to land outside the airfield boundary. When the main runway is being used, there are fields available at the eastern and western ends of the airfield. Note these fields on your next aerotow. These fields will save your life, but not necessarily the glider. When aero-towing from the other runways the options are more limited and so there is a greater chance that the glider will be damaged. Do not try to turn back to the airfield by turning at less than 200 feet AGL.

Aerotow launch failure is practised at White Card stage in the Falke.

Grid launching

On days when many gliders want to launch as soon as it gets soarable, a grid may be established. On marginal days and weekdays, consult the duty instructor whether a grid will be set up. The objective is to reduce congestion at the normal launch-point but if there are few people, there may not be enough to man an extra launch-point. At week-ends in the summer, a grid is inevitable if there has been a good forecast.

The grid should consist of two lines. One line must be at least two wingspans away from the edge of the perimeter track. The second row should be even further away and well clear of the first row. The first gliders in each row should be alongside the easterly doors of the main hangar for a launch to the east or should be opposite the Brown Elephant for a launch to the west. Gliders can join the grid until launching has started. After launching has started, late arrivals should go to the normal launch point from where they will be launched immediately after the grid has been launched.

The first launch will be made when it is considered soarable. Although one or two gliders may be able to stay airborne before that, it is not safe to launch 20-80 gliders in conditions where they will occupy the same heights in a few thermals.

It is important that pilots who have at least five gliders in the line front of them, help out by collecting tow-ropes and hooking on. As your turn approaches, get yourself ready to avoid delaying the launching.