

OCEAN RODEO GLIDE A-SERIES

Ocean Rodeo's first entry into the wing market comes with a wealth of knowledge gained from many years of kite design up in the freezing waters of British Columbia. A brand normally associated with robust equipment for gnarly conditions, the Glide A-Series is anything but heavy duty. This is the first wing we've seen made entirely from the lightweight and high stiffness ALUULA material, which has been pioneered recently with Ocean Rodeo's inflatable kites.

Ground-breaking new materials aside, we're presented with a relatively flowing sweep to the wing, a mid-depth forward biased profile and a gentle dihedral, making the wing relatively flat. Two arrow slit windows are present which allow some downwind awareness. The main visual difference that we see in a comparison with the existing marketplace from a shape perspective is in the strut diameter. This is very slim and exceptionally stiff with a high inflate pressure of 12psi; the front tube is pumped up to a more casual 8psi. But - without a doubt - this is the stiffest full inflatable wing we've seen so far. Physically trying to bend the strut is virtually impossible at full pressure.

Ocean Rodeo have implemented a modular handle system they've coined the Matrix, with an optional carbon boom on the way. There are some mid-diameter handles, which are really well placed with enough width to trim, particularly on the rear handle. For total minimalism, you can remove the center handle, stripping down to the bare

essentials, which was great for more advanced wave riding. The handles are a comfortable diameter and made of a robust webbing. The front handle design is very well executed, stiff and easy enough to grip. It's big enough to grab easily and its rigidity allows extra control when luffing the wing on a wave, and there's some neoprene behind it to prevent any knuckle rub. The wing is so light, you can almost support it with just the front handle in no wind which means that, when waveriding, it has a ghost-like quality - particularly if you're riding in onshore conditions - and you really can pretty much forget about the wing and focus on the wave. The change in materials means the future of winging is going to be lighter, easier to access and more efficient.

There's not a hint of standard Dacron on any part of the Glide; all small reinforcements (for instance the leading edge to canopy join), window frames, and trailing edge darts are all ALUULA. The canopy is then made from D2 cloth from Teijin which makes for a decent balance of weight and solidity. One of the key differences between a standard Dacron and ALUULA wing is in the usable wind range or sweet spot. In the top end we noticed the lack of flex in the airframe meant the Glide was exceptionally composed. Where a Dacron wing would start to get out of shape, deform and become less efficient, the ALUULA just seems to suck it up and point further upwind rather

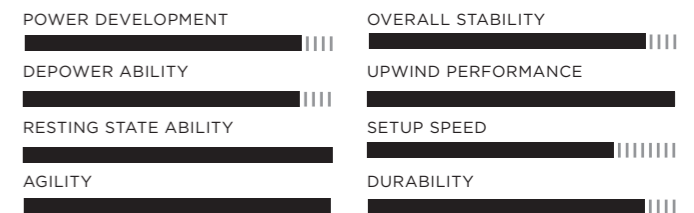
than bend and drag. There is a complete lack of flapping and deformation even when completely stacked. It is more akin to a fully flattened windsurf sail. The expansion in wind range means even the most power-sensitive winger is going to have a more minimal quiver. You can easily skip an intermediate size and not feel uncomfortable.

Running into your maneuvers, the Glide A-Series has light and passive handling. The wing's inherent efficiency means it's not going to load irritating fatigue into your forearms. Running into tacks the wing behaves impeccably, with zero flapping even when quite overpowered. What's also noticeable is that to generate power and forward speed, you can use a much smaller angle adjustment than with a standard construction wing. This means the user experience is far gentler, nuanced and less tiring than a standard Dacron wing. At the other end of the scale, when really powering and loading up for a jump, the wing barely flexes and loses very little power, meaning that there's a clean translation of forward speed into orbital levels of lift.

This is perhaps the most effective application of the ALUULA fabric we've experienced. Making something as tactile as a hand wing from ALUULA is the perfect showcase of the new material's attributes. It's even more noticeable than when it is applied to kites. The stiffness and increase in efficiency achieved from the scarily rigid and low-diameter strut and far more gust-resistant airframe is truly impressive... **RB**



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ARMSTRONG HA925

New Zealand is a hotbed of foil advancement at the moment, and after much development with input from Kiwi America's Cup Helmsman Pete Burling, Armstrong have released a true high aspect foil, which sits as the little brother of the HA1125, aiming for a highly manoeuvrable and fast surf foil to market.

In the hands, the HA925 immediately feels light sitting at around 900g. It's a high density foam core wrapped in exquisite high modulus carbon. Like its larger HA1125 sibling, the HA925 is compatible with the A+ modular system Armstrong established this year. The increased stiffness they have built into the A+ system more than comfortably accommodates a small high aspect ratio wing with very little play in the junctions.

Visually, the HA925 looks like some sort of futuristic dragonfly. There's a light arc in the centre section of the foil over its span, and the tips curve back almost inverted, which allows you to whip your tips out and recover with a decent level of control and flow through the turn. The overall profile is noticeably thin, with the most thickness in the centre section, fading out to some skinny tips.

We paired it with both the 232 tail and Flying V200 which both yield quite different performances. If you want to tone down the experience or are a little apprehensive riding such a high aspect foil, the 232 is the way to go, this makes things more sure footed and grippy particularly noticeable when winging at high speeds. You need to be on your game to get the most from it, but the V200 really livens things up and makes for super snappy yaw turns, which will spice up prone foiling. It increases manoeuvrability substantially. Whether surfing or winging, we felt that the HA925 pairs well with an 85cm mast to get the most out of it. It likes to sit forward in the foil box a little with weight over the mast for optimum control through the turns. You can see the logic behind the new Armstrong board geometry

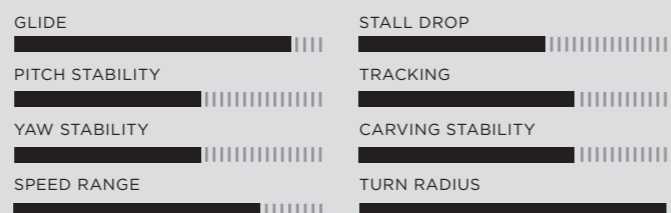
Winging on the HA925 is fast and furious, and the angles you can achieve upwind are extremely impressive. There's no denying it's a little technical to ride at first, but you can eek a massive amount of performance from it in straight line speed and turning. The initial lift is impressive for its surface area, as is often the case with these high aspect wings. In its extreme top speed range, the 925 refuses to build any front foot pressure, running very neutrally which gives you great control.



For the average weight rider, the HA925 is going to be a quiver topper for wing and prone use when the conditions are looking aligned powered and perfect. For me at 90kg running it alongside the 1250v2 or HA1125 would be a sensible choice as a more of an all-rounder for variable northern European conditions. If you're sub 80kgs, the 925 is going to have massive range of application and for intermediates and above, it could well be your daily driver, with limitless performance you are unlikely to grow out of.

The HA925 feels extremely precise, manoeuvrable and glides exceptionally providing you maintain speed, and keep high on the mast. It's a high aspect wing that really concentrates on precision carving, resulting in a true surgeon's scalpel of foils, and proliferating the surfy feel that transcends the Armstrong range into a turbocharged front wing.

ARMSTRONG HA925



RRD BELUGA 150 LTE

It's Y26 and the RRD Beluga is now in its second year with a whole array of smaller sizes added to the range for the building market of more advanced or smaller wing enthusiasts. At 55 liters, the 150 is going to be a sinker for the majority of users. In the hands, the LTE construction feels tough, and the matte finish doesn't seem too sensitive to the usual scrapes from day to day use. A well placed and sensible thickness EVA pad gives you great grip and a decent connection to the board; the rear pad kick is also very useful for your rear foot placement, which works well with the relative position of foil track. From a practical perspective, the rear-mounted handle makes it easy to negotiate shore break and long walk ins.

Sensible footstrap placements mean that when adequately powered, the deep-water start is as easy as it gets; we managed to knee-start strapless with it in windy conditions without much hassle, as the buoyancy in the board is so evenly positioned and the concave deck sits well around your knees meaning it's easy to perch on whilst it's under the surface. It sits well underneath you even in fairly rough sea conditions.

The pronounced double concave in the nose with aggressive central spine runs over the first two thirds of the board, and means if the board lands hard from a jump, it displaces water with a minimum of fuss. In a wave scenario, the low swing weight also shines, and if you make any pitch misjudgments and nose dives, the board bounces out and recovers in a similarly dignified fashion, helping you avoid some big stacks. When throwing a rotation, the board pivots quickly and easily without having to skew the foil upwind too much on takeoff.

In a surf scenario the Beluga in this size feels dainty and agile, every small movement is translated down to the foil, making for instant pitch adjustment, and a nice lack of aerial drag and windage. The relatively narrow width means you can make a carve of consequence without clipping the rail.

The Beluga 150 packs plenty of volume into a minimal length, and is friendly enough to serve as a perfect first sinker board, particularly for a rider that has ambitions of learning freestyle, with its low rotational swing weight and ultra-forgiving bottom shape. It's going to suit being paired with faster and more efficient hydrofoils to get the most from it, and for a lot of people will make for a sensible step down from a full flotation board. **RB**



RRD BELUGA LTE 150

