

# Choosing a paraglider for accuracy

ANDY WEBSTER DISCUSSES WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN SELECTING A PARAGLIDER FOR ACCURACY WORK

There isn't really a best paraglider for accuracy as there are so many variables to consider. A pilot's flying style and weight play a part, as do different flying conditions. I cannot really advise on the merits of the most popular models used because I have not flown them all, and being light in weight I can only describe experiences flying XS and S wings. However from what I have picked up, and from speaking to others, I have put together some items to consider when looking for a paraglider for accuracy.

## EN Rating

FAI Section 7C rules state that for use in paragliding accuracy competitions paragliders shall be EN certified. Most accuracy pilots would say that low EN A gliders are best due to their low airspeed, low glide ratio and forgiving characteristics under deep brake. Accuracy pilots make more take-offs and landings, and towed flights, per flying hour than the average pilot and such wings, designed for use by students, tend to be of robust construction. Pilots crossing over from a parasending or parachuting background will find a low-performance paraglider closer to what they are used to.

The U-Turn Evolution and BDG Adam are probably the lowest performance paragliders available at the moment and the latter is very popular. The only thing to watch out for is being caught short in high winds, or when a long glide is required to get to the target.

High-end EN As and low-end Bs are also used, particularly by those who need a glider for both accuracy and recreational flying, but their more dynamic reaction to brake movement will not suit most accuracy pilots. It is possible to fly higher rated gliders to a target in smooth conditions, but for success in all conditions a low EN wing will be more effective. Having said that, double world

champion Matjaz Feraric flies an EN B BGD Wasp very successfully; the glider suits his shallow final glide on approach.

## Pilot weight

Different-sized paragliders do not scale equally in terms of performance. You will sometimes hear stories of XS gliders being unable to meet the same certification class as the larger sizes. The same holds true in accuracy: a pilot flying a large glider in the middle of its weight range may be able to sink his glider nicely on to the target with progressive application of brake, whereas a pilot flying an XS glider at mid weight range may surge off to the side with the same application of brake. A larger pilot might say his glider is great for accuracy when a lightweight pilot would struggle with a smaller size of the same model.

Another consideration is your position within the glider's weight range. Being light within the range will mean lower airspeed, which is good for accuracy as you have a bit more time to place your foot, especially in light winds. You will however be more susceptible to any lift that could bounce you off the target.

Flying at the top end of the weight range should mean being less susceptible to lift, but the higher airspeed will make it harder to place your foot on the target accurately in low wind speeds. Being closer to the middle of the weight range is best (if you

are outside the weight range you will not be able to fly the glider in FAI competitions).

It would be nice to have a larger paraglider for low wind speeds and a smaller one for higher wind speeds. However you can only fly one paraglider in a competition and you need one that you can fly in all wind speeds.

## Flying characteristics

As stated above, paragliders that have a dynamic response to brake movement will not suit most accuracy pilots, especially when active flying is required to deal with unwanted thermic activity or wind gusts close to the target. Low EN A gliders with a docile response are best in these conditions, although these can also have a problem in that they dive more than other types when brake is released. This can be problematic if you suddenly release the brakes in a bid to avoid landing short of the target. Some pilots are quite happy with this, knowing that they have to fly a steeper glide to the target.

Brake pressure is another characteristic to consider. Most accuracy pilots like a relatively high pressure for feedback on the amount of brake being applied and the stall point. Brake pressure varies between designs and your position within the weight range can also affect it. I am on the top side of the weight range on my EN A rated Small UP Ascent 4 and

it has quite high brake pressure, which I like for accuracy.

You need to fly a paraglider in different conditions to see if it suits you for accuracy, and you won't get this knowledge from a few test flights. Really you need a full season to discover the flying characteristics of a paraglider in different conditions: nil wind, strong wind and thermic conditions.

Most EN A paragliders require wraps to get full use of the brakes down to the stall point, but the number of wraps can vary a lot. Adjusting the brake line length will put the glider out of certification, so if you don't like taking wraps it may be worth looking round for a paraglider that requires fewer of them.

No adjustments are allowed in FAI competitions as this this will put the paraglider out of certification. In the past people have been known to modify how the brake lines pull down the trailing edge giving better performance for accuracy. It was interesting to read Steve Uzochukwu's report, in June Skywings, on the new Skywalk Mescal 6 with its two certified brake line settings that give two handling modes. It will be intriguing to see if the Mescal 6 'Comfort' mode, that pulls down the centre of the trailing edge more to give less lively handling, is good for accuracy.

## Model revisions

As time goes by paraglider models get updated, and some updates are more radical than others. This can mean that a model can lose its recognised accuracy potential in the next generation, and vice-versa. Flying characteristics can also change between upgrades, sometimes without changing a glider's accuracy potential; pilots just need to adjust to the new characteristics. Upgrading from a UP Ascent 3 XS to an Ascent 4 S, I was top side of the weight range on both. The brake pressure was higher on the Ascent 4 in

deep brake and there was no need to take any wraps as there was with the Ascent 3.

## Popular models

The paraglider manufacturer flown can be influenced a lot by the local dealer, and some pilots may not necessarily be flying the best accuracy paraglider for them. But as an indicator of the best paragliders for accuracy I have listed the top eight models used in the 2019 World Cup series, in order of popularity with the most popular at the top. All the models are EN A rated.

- BGD Adam
- Gin Bolero
- Gradient Bright
- Sky Aya
- Gin Yeti
- Skywalk Mescal
- Advance Alpha
- 777 Deck

## Summary

To fly in FAI accuracy competitions it is essential that your paraglider has an EN rating and you fly within its weight range. If you are new to accuracy it would be best to go for a low/mid EN A glider that you see listed a lot in accuracy competition results. With time you will better understand flying characteristics in all conditions and be able to determine what suits you best. If the opportunity arises, fly other models too to experience their characteristics and brake pressures.

At the end of the day you can possibly look too deeply at all the different aspects of a paraglider that could suit you, when a big factor in accuracy is your own flying skills. Don't get too hung up about choice - get a paraglider that appears to suit you, learn its characteristics in all conditions and embrace them.

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All photos: Andrew Webster

BGD Adam (Sandor Kaszas), most popular paraglider in the 2019 World Cup series



Gradient Bright (Dejan Valek), second in numbers to Gin's Bolero in PGAWC comps



The Sky Aya (Kamil Konecny)



... and Advance Alpha (Sergei Usanov Jr) also featured in the World Cup series

