



Many people have pointed out that there is nothing new about speed riding. This is best summed up by the brilliant cartoon *Le Kratair Club* in Parapente Magazine, where one of the characters goes on to the ski slope with his old antique seven-cell canopy for a last flight before throwing it away. He zooms in and out of the trees and demolishes an igloo before landing. He gazes up nostalgically at the circling paragliders before he is set upon by a bounding youth, enthusiastically bigging up his flight and asking to be taught speed riding!

What has changed is that the ground-skimming early flights were often just that because of the limitations of the 'chutes, while now the wings are dedicated and purpose-built for this new sport.

Niviuk - not Nivi(UK) - was going to be my opening line, but Andy Talbot has taken on the Niviuk range and now there is a Niviuk (UK). Niviuk have been very quick to see the potential of the speed riding market and are offering a three-size range of their Nooky at 11, 13 and 15m² (the model I flew for this review).

Their presentation of which size to choose is plain and commonsense. It relates weight to size, so that three separate pilots across the weight range can fly the same size. This will of course give a ride of greater speed for greater weight, plus handling differences and a different glide angle. So the Nooky 15 is an intermediate at 65 - 90kg all-up and a Sport class at 90 - 110kg. My flights were at 105kg.

These gliders' chief application is to the ski market but already, like many other makes, they are attracting pilots looking for small wings for flying in

higher winds but capable of landing in low winds. The Nooky 15 is well suited for this. From construction detail to profile it is a small paragliding wing that does not need a gale to be flown, yet will offer a nil-wind landing. The design and build are paraglider level but the profile is fatter than a conventional paraglider with correspondingly broader leading edge openings.

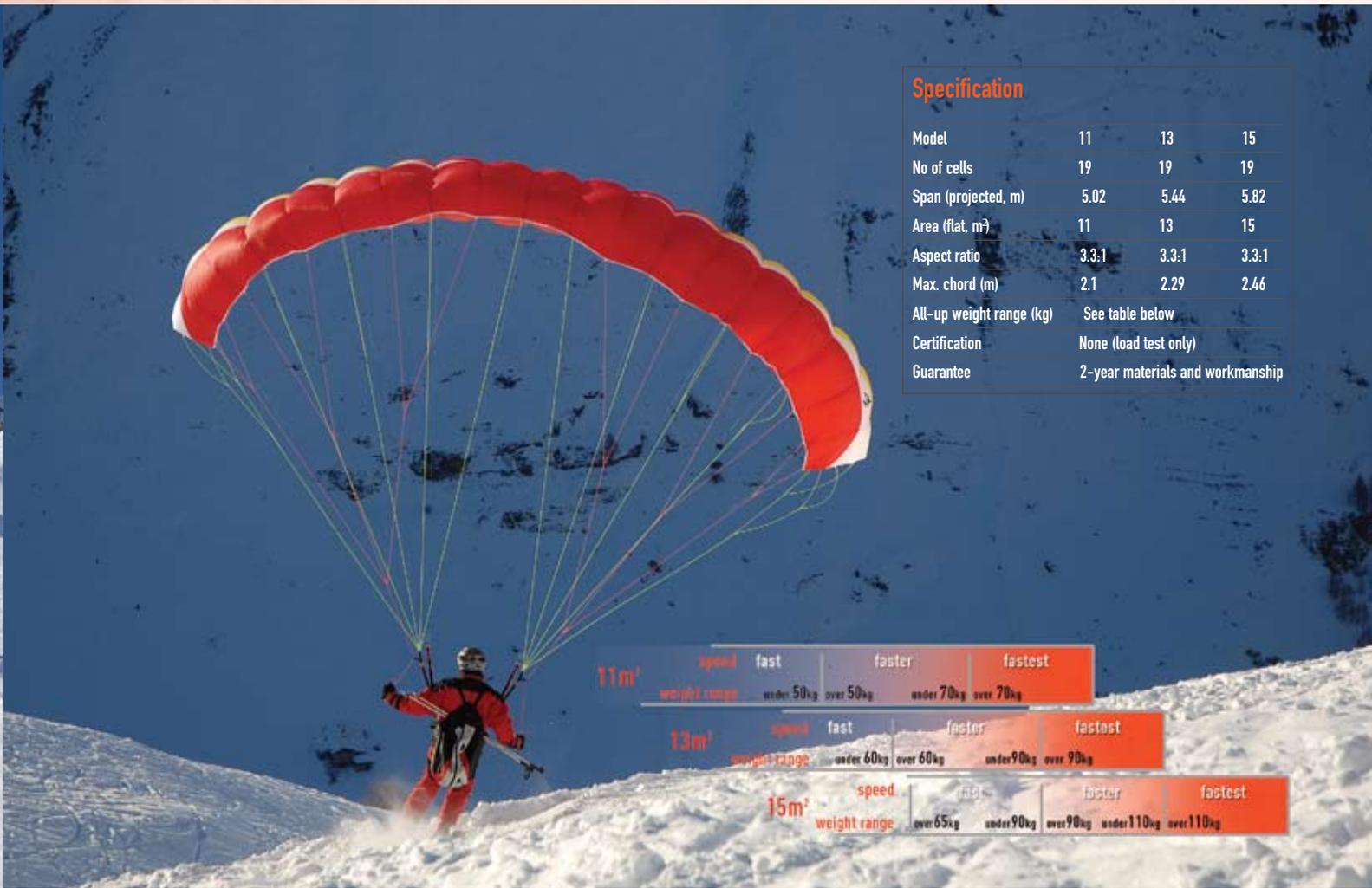
There seem to be some principles relating to the speed riding wing that both defines the flying style and restricts the design criteria. In the true speed riding usage, with the skis sometimes firmly on the snow, the wing can be used in deep brake to slow the glide - often to the extent that the wing trailing edge can nearly brush the ground. Letting up has to be done with a speed increase or you will be overflowed, and the subsequent take-off will need more speed. So you need a wing that can take a lot of brake but also be accelerated without losing form, therefore bigger cells. The other consideration is that small wings can oscillate a lot and the radius cannot be too tight. Having paraglider designers leading these developments (thank goodness) means that these requirements are generally met, and the flying aspect is just as important as the ability to glide along on skis with the wing above you. So these speed riding wings have to be stable, able to hold their form well and yet also offer a wide range of brake control.

Design and construction

It is worth going over the construction of the Nooky in some detail in case pilots feel that these wings are toys and not up to certified wing

standard. From the harness there are two risers. The A riser at the front has a trim tab that brings the nose down when applied, and lets it go back to trim when let off. The trim tab has about 3cm of travel, applied by a large pull handle. It doesn't appear to make a big difference but it has a large effect in flight. Five A lines go to the A and B canopy points. These are in line from front to back, except the outer A that has four lines to the stabiliser points. From the B riser five lines go to C and D positions and the back of the stabiliser. The brake handles are on those lovely strong orange magnetic poppers. There are swivels on the brake lines, good stiff brake handles and pullies for the brake line run, and the big thick brake lines have a very low cascade joint going to six brake points on the training edge. The riser tops have triangular mailons with stoppers.

The wing itself has large cells with front mylar formers. There are reinforcement tapes through the side walls to the top surface where they meet and overlap the next set. For extra strength there are mylar circles on the tapes at the B tabs. Internally the tension straps are fabric with diagonals for A and B. The As are diagonal-taped on the leading edge, a tidy touch. This is very nice build and very strong - I say again: no toy. The build is very normal with diagonals off the load-bearing cells all the way to the stabiliser sealed cells. There is a butt-hole on the outside back of each stabiliser for clearing out any debris you acquire or for lost objects of personal worth. You either love these... or hate them when they get clogged. There are some who claim you will go faster if you leave them open, or you could have the holes in your face sealed for the same effect.



Specification			
Model	11	13	15
No of cells	19	19	19
Span (projected, m)	5.02	5.44	5.82
Area (flat, m²)	11	13	15
Aspect ratio	3.3:1	3.3:1	3.3:1
Max. chord (m)	2.1	2.29	2.46
All-up weight range (kg)	See table below		
Certification	None (load test only)		
Guarantee	2-year materials and workmanship		

11m ²	speed	fast	faster	fastest	
	weight range	under 50kg	over 50kg	under 70kg	over 70kg
13m ²	speed	fast	faster	fastest	
	weight range	under 60kg	over 60kg	under 90kg	over 90kg
15m ²	speed	fast	faster	fastest	
	weight range	over 65kg	under 90kg	over 90kg	under 110kg

I am becoming a real fan of the speed riding-inspired harness and bag combinations. The Niviuk version compromises between a full harness build while looking for some weight savings. It does have a chest buckle but has put-through buckles on the leg straps which are right under the hang points. Like most other harnesses it has slip-through vertical straps to alter the flight position, and these go right under the seat for the main weight loading. There is also a high chest strap to stop the looser harness falling off your shoulders at take-off. With side adjustment, big thigh pads with no stiffeners and a good build quality, this is a really nice harness that complements the wing. Most speed riders are going to come with such a combination harness, and it makes sense. When you turn the harness inside-out the resulting bag has ice-axe loops, gear loops on the belt, shoulder adjustment, plastic buckles, vertical foam up the back, large comfy hand loops, twin zips and a hip belt. It is comfortable to wear, and made more so by the reduced weight of the whole outfit. It also comes with an incredibly rusty inner bag with a hang crab and large shoulder loop.

In flight

Forward launching the Nooky is no different from launching a full-size paraglider: weight forward and feel the wing come forward. There is not much tendency to overshoot but a touch of brake helps. What is different is the need to keep going and going fast. Flat-out helps as it is only then that the wing feels like lifting. I choose some really steep faces for launching after a while as I had every confidence in the wing staying steady and it was easier - with the steep glide angle - to get off.

In a windspeed of 14mph the Nooky was easy to reverse launch. Your paraglider instincts have to be controlled as this feels very strong to launch in. When I dumped it a few times I could control it, but 15 metres is still a lot of kite. In these high winds, keeping the wall still and pulling on a lot of brake meant that I came up against the brake cascade, and I used an old Gerald Williams trick of actually holding this cluster in my fingers where I could feel each brake line to the trailing edge. Then a normal pull-up, steady the wing, turn and go. The Nooky is very stable above your head and can take steadying brake, but you will immediately realise that large controls produce very large responses, so be subtle in your inputs.

The small-wing feeling in flight is fast. Turns are very quick even with slight deflections, and trying to stay up with more brake is very counter-productive. You have to look well ahead and remember how much height you can lose in the turn. Approaches to land require real concentration as you want to be straight and level plus flat out to flare. In the high soaring winds I flew in the Nooky felt very stable and the high loading is comforting. Doing beats timed for turns in lift is easily done and a lot of fun.

You will lose height in turns. These can be fairly flat and smooth, but any hand-up-on-one-side turns are very fast and the canopy dives ahead and in front of you. Not to be done too close to the ground! I flew mostly with the trimmers off for a better sink rate - if they are on you are considerably faster but there is not much time in the air to operate them.

After landing there is such a buzz from this sort of flying. I have been asked what sort of pilot level you

should be for this sort of thing. My answer is that you really have to have confidence in your decision making. There is no inherent problem with this sort of flying, you just have to think it through. Certainly I felt very confident on the Nooky. It was not spooky or mad - I understood what it would do and did not try and exceed those abilities.

The verdict? A good speed riding wing. It's stable and easily controlled with smooth movements, with a positive brake response. It has good construction and strength, plenty of speed and an exciting ride, with all your senses wide open. Speed riding has opened up many new ideas well beyond the initial skiing concept, and I would not be surprised to see the crossover extension into sub-20m paragliders coming from this firm.

Importer's comment

The Nooky is one of the newest generation of "Speed Wings" on the market. However, as Bill has already identified, it is much more than just a speed wing. The primary use of this wing is for use with skis, snow and mountains, but it lends itself perfectly to conditions which are a little too strong for conventional paragliders. For anyone considering expanding their flying repertoire, the quality of the full package and the performance of the Nooky is seriously worth looking at. This should be entered into with the knowledge that this variation of paragliding, if you want it to be, can be fast and furious with an adrenaline buzz like no other. Confidence is a must-have!

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