

Different Operations

Firstly, an apology because as any good pilot knows, a proper flying warrie should not only start with “There I was” but should also involve appropriate hand movements, and I can’t do that on paper. Anyway, there I was, on 137 Pilots’ Course back in 1986, having done a solo flight in a Macchi from Gingin, and it was my instructor’s job to fly me home to Pearce. Being a Navy A4 driver, he liked the chance to go for a hoon, so we came through initial doing at least 350 and pitched out. Gear speed in the Macchi was 150, meaning we had to lose over 200 knots in the turn. Willy achieved that with power idle, speedbrake, and the best part of 6g, which was my first-ever experience of g-induced grey-out and tunnel vision.

INITIAL AND PITCH

Anyway, that’s our first topic this month under the heading of “Operations that are a bit different from the standard flying at Northam”, and which you may encounter from time to time at non-towered aerodromes. A little while back Airservices in their wisdom decided to include a description of “Initial and pitch” in the AIP. It’s covered under “Operations in Class G Airspace” in AIP ENR 10. An Initial and Pitch starts at an Initial Point which is 5nm downwind, which means more or less the same spot that you’d join for a 5nm straight-in approach, only displaced to the dead side. It’s usually at circuit height, and at a country aerodrome you could expect the RAAF to consider the locals and stick to 1000 ft. They’ll track (or hoon) inbound at high speed, and abeam the runway they’ll do a steep turn to roll out on downwind. If there are two of them the leading aircraft will pitch first and roll out on about mid-downwind, and the second one will pitch a couple of seconds later and roll out behind the first, on an earlier downwind.

So it’s a bit like a midfield crosswind join, only faster and with a bit more g. Most importantly, at the speeds involved, they’re likely to be in your face before you get a chance to see them, so listen out. And if they call at Initial, which is 5nm away, and they’re doing 300 kt, that’s 1 minute. So if you’ve just got airborne for circuits in the old 172, they’ll probably be on downwind before you are.

GLIDER TANGO UNIFORM GOLF, DOWNWIND RUNWAY 14, TOUCH AND GO

OK, that’s an unlikely radio call. But there is an extra thing or two you can think about at an airfield where there are gliding operations. In case you want to venture to Cunderdin, or as far afield as Beverley or Narrogin, here are a couple of tips I’ve gleaned from those who fly without engines, and those who tow those who fly without engines.

Right of way is the biggest concern to glider and tug pilots. The rules for avoiding collision – power gives way to everything, airships give way to gliders and balloons, gliders give way to balloons – are based on the pretty logical premise that the more manoeuvrable aircraft gives way to the less manoeuvrable one. Based on that logic, a tug towing a glider is very unmanoeuvrable, so you must give way to it. Two aircraft,

one behind the other, are much easier to see than one, and they all use radio, so seeing and avoiding a tug with a glider in tow shouldn't be too hard.

The other consideration about giving way to gliders is in the circuit. The rules say you must give way to an aircraft that is compelled to land – again pretty logical – and a glider in the circuit is of course compelled to land. In practice it means that if you're, say, late downwind for Runway 14 at Cunderdin and a glider broadcasts joining downwind, he will be on the ground before you. He'll be flying a continuously descending circuit and you'll probably be extending downwind. And don't forget if you extend downwind, to start finals on the right profile you'll want to roll out higher than 500 ft AGL. And if you're on base when a glider joins downwind, you don't have the option of extending and slotting in behind him, so always be prepared to go around to accommodate those who don't have that option.

A couple of other little tips that help everyone: when the spare glider and tugs and vehicles are sitting by the side of the runway, aim to touch down past them if you can. It's a bit hard if they're parked halfway down an 800 metre runway, but if they're close to the threshold on a 1500 metre runway like 14 at Cunderdin, there's plenty of room to touch down past them and make it less hazardous for everyone if you have a mishap such as a blown tyre or a runway excursion.

Another one you may consider – not possible at Beverley – is if the wind is light, it may be easier and more convenient to use the runway the gliders aren't using. A tug and glider lined up about to take off on 14 at Cunderdin can easily wait for you to do a touch and go on 05, but they'll prevent you doing that touch and go on 14.

RA AIRCRAFT

The main consideration with the light sport aircraft (LSA) is that while some of them fly at similar speeds to the old 172 or Cherokee, many of them are quite a bit slower. They also tend to do closer circuits. So as for the gliders, if you're on mid downwind and a LSA calls turning downwind, his circuit may be inside yours, and depending on his speed, he may want to turn base before you. Although calls turning base tend to be the preserve of those irritating pilots who see the need to yabber on the radio every 30 seconds in the circuit, this may be a time when a call turning base is a good idea.

PARACHUTE OPERATIONS

As a rule you're not going to try to land at an aerodrome where parachute operations are in progress. But when you're flying near those aerodromes, some awareness is obviously useful, and you can use your radio to reassure the pilot of the meatbomber that you're not about to fly under him and take out a couple of canopies.

If you're anywhere near Brooklands you'll be on Melbourne Centre (120.3) and because they often drop from 14,000 feet, which is in controlled airspace, you'll hear the pilot talking to Centre and asking for clearance to drop. He'll usually also report when he's lightened his load: "10 canopies in the air."

Often when I've flown near Brooklands and the parachute pilot has talked to Centre, Centre has told him something like: "Unidentified aircraft 2 miles east of Brooklands, tracking north, 3000, intentions unknown." Being on the ball as you expect your club instructors to be, I'll just say something like: "Melbourne Centre, PGL, 172, 2 miles east of Brooklands. We'll avoid the drop zone." Centre may ask us to squawk Ident to confirm that we are indeed the one they've identified. It's neither here nor there to Melbourne, but it just reassures the meatbomber pilot that you're on the frequency, you're aware of his intentions, and you'll stay clear.

Happy flying, and watch out for the parachutes, the lighties, the gliders, the RAAF and, most importantly, the Jandakot pilots!

Kevin
