

Slope

Aero-towing, airbrakes and retracts

Subjects for slope soarers by Keith Thomas

Aero-towing (from the top of a hill)

DO YOU LIKE PIGEON-HOLES? I do — in so far as they keep good old George from writing about what I want to write about. Otherwise I don't at all. Are you a slope-soarer or a thermal-soarer? Or are you just an aeromodeller, like me? When so many thermal soaring gliders are successfully pressed into service at the slope, and when not a few slope gliders end up being hauled aloft on a winch or bungee, there seems little point in trying to categorise too strongly.

That's my excuse, anyway, as I want to report on an interesting flying meeting held recently by the Uffington White Horse Model Club in Oxfordshire, where aero-towing was the main item on the menu — with power winch launching for those otherwise inclined. The flying site was a flat grass field situated on high ground with reasonable slopes dropping away on both long sides. After a successful launch, the model could be guided into the slope lift area and soared for quite long periods; who's going to quibble about what category of soaring *that* is?

Members of the White Horse club have evidently been putting in a lot of hours' practice at aero-towing, and over the weekend of 19/20 May this practice was turned to excellent account. Four tugs were available for glider launching, one of them having travelled up from Plymouth with its owner, Chris Wool.

Martin Spackman's tug (foreground) and Chris Wool's similar model, old yeoman glider towing service at Uffington recently.

The two larger models could cope with any of the large and heavy gliders present, including the 15lb. Moswey which I had taken along, and Roy Pitts 1:3 scale Grunau Baby, which probably weighs even more. Two smaller tugs, in the shape of Wot-4s, catered for the lighter sport gliders.

Martin Spackman, of the host club, and Chris Wool proved to be capable and experienced tug pilots, and literally dozens of successful launches were achieved over the week-end. So successful was the tugging that the winch was hardly used at all. At the busiest periods the tugs were launching gliders as if from a conveyor belt, with the result that there were often six or more gliders airborne at a time. Sport models were zipped up behind the Wot-4s, and even the heaviest gliders were up to release height in just two or three minutes, the tug then tearing down again for the next man. Exciting and fascinating to watch, and equally enjoyable to take part in.

The only real problem concerned the length of the grass; there was a close-mown centre circle which provided the tug with a smooth take-off run, but the

grass surrounding it was long enough to snag wingtips and tailplanes on take-off on quite a few occasions. To counter this problem, a long polythene 'runway' was fixed to the ground, and this slippery surface seemed to be successful for many gliders. One or two of the 'lower-slung' types still encountered difficulties on the ground-run. For these models it proved to be better to allow the glider to take off from the centre circle, and the tug to run across the rougher grass. I have mentioned this problem because it serves to illustrate how well the White Horse crew's experience coped with the situation. Whenever a glider or tug got into difficulties on take-off, the tug pilot 'kicked off' the glider in very short order, generally before it had left the ground. The tug would then take off, fly a short circuit, and land for a further attempt. In the conditions this occurred pretty regularly (one aborted attempt for each of my own flights, for example).

There was no significant damage to any aircraft over the period of a whole day's flying, which could be attributed to the take-off and tugging phases. Once the models were off the ground, just about every launch turned into a straightforward climb out to height, with the tug pulling the glider round in one wide circuit, and releasing at some very considerable heights.

The Janter, illustrated below, had to abort the tow at low altitudes on occasions — good reactions by the tug and glider pilots prevented any damage. Polythene 'runway' helped glider take-offs.

