

Over the Sky to See!

Whilst waiting in the Feshie clubhouse to fly our K21 "Daisy ETA" during their Octoberfest, Nick Norman came in and asked if I'd had a flight. I explained that Andy, another syndicate member, was flying a couple of visitors in ETA and Henry and I would fly later. Nick asked me if I'd like a flight with him in his ASH25E! Now I had to think about that! A local bumble around in our K21 or a flight in an ASH! Sorry Henry, but no contest!

When we pushed the ASH on-line I was filled with great anticipation. I might have had a heart-stopping moment if I'd known that Paul Myers, the tuggy for the day, had quietly had a word with Nick to explain that the aerotows were getting very rough. Typically, Nick wasn't worried and explained the ASH would just 'punch through it'!

I'm so grateful that Paul agreed to tow us. We climbed on board and after all the necessary pre-flight checks, the tug taxied in front of us. I'd been advised not to look out for the first ten minutes - the wings of the ASH being very flexible and aerotows at Feshie are definitely scarytows, even under perfect conditions! Curiosity got the better of me. I didn't want to miss a moment of what I was hoping would be an interesting flight. That became the understatement of the year!

Obviously with lots of wave about and, added to that the fact that Nick had reached 19,500ft during a check flight in the morning, I checked that the oxygen system was turned on! Well you have to live in hope, don't you?

The ASH didn't have any trouble punching through the rough air. It wasn't even that bumpy, although I'm not sure what it was like for the tug. Nick released from aerotow at 2,000ft in strong lift and we were soon climbing steadily in the wave.

After Nick had got us established, he offered me the controls, but I thought better of it at that time. The ASH is not the easiest glider to handle, having a 25 metre wingspan and I didn't want to lose the lift and end up back in circuit so early in the flight.

Nick declared that he didn't want to go high on this flight. Why would he? He'd been to 19,500ft that morning and holds the Cairngorm Gliding Club record after reaching 28,500ft in May 2016. I was disappointed for a second until Nick said



"Let's go to Skye!" For someone who is inclined to cling by my fingernails to Parlick this sounded incredible and it didn't disappoint! There's high and HIGH!

As we were climbing at a steady 9kts it wasn't very long before we needed to go on oxygen. This was another first for me.

The EDS system bleeps a warning if the pilot hasn't taken a breath for a certain time. Poor Nick was worried that I would pass out, as my system bleeped quite often. I was definitely still breathing, just not as

Speed bonnie ASH like a bird on the wing, over the sea to Skye!



frequently as the system required. I was too busy taking in the stunning views. It was amazing to be able to see both the Moray Firth in the east and the Firth of Lorne in the west. We saw Loch Ness, (no Nessie) and Ardverikie House on the shore of Loch Laggan, famous as Glen Bogle Castle in the 'Monarch of the Glen' TV series. There were so many sites I'd seen on the ground, but never from the air before. The whole panorama was one of mountains and lochs. In fact, whilst taking in the vista, I was very aware of how un-landable the terrain appeared to be. However, at 14,000+ft that wasn't an immediate concern.



We followed Loch Hourn crossing over the Sound of Sleat to Skye having passed to the north of Mallaig.



We could see the Skye Road Bridge, which didn't exist the last time I'd visited the island. There's a family joke that I'd been to Skye twice before and never seen it! – due to very low cloud and driving rain! We didn't have such a problem this time. The Cuillins did have a cloudy cap, but I could see them at last. And what a view from approximately 14,500 feet above Elgol.

In my excitement in preparing for the flight, I had forgotten to put my phone in my pocket. Not a good idea when going cross-country, but even less so with such wonderful views to record. Luckily, Nick had his phone with him and took some stunning photos, a few of which I've included. Sadly it was all

too soon time to turn back and Nick followed the snail trail on his nav-aid.

At one point, we encountered strong sink where we had been in strong lift on the outbound leg! No surprise there then! Taking a slight detour to the south, closer to Mallaig and following Loch Nevis, we found lift again and this route afforded us a glimpse of Ben Nevis, sadly hiding under a blanket of cloud with Fort William nestling at its feet. On the way back, I took the controls and it was effortless to tank along at 100kts! I slowed to 70kts to reduce the noise while Nick contacted ATC to cross the airway.

Ah well, what goes up must come down!

Soon we were descending to Feshie airfield and Nick took control again. We had covered approximately 280km in just two and a half hours, but the memories will last a lifetime.

The ASH may look like a gooney bird on take-off and approach in turbulent conditions, but she is a wonderful, sleek glider and built for travel. Thanks again Nick for such a memorable experience. The word 'Skye' will forever raise a smile on my face! And thanks to everyone at Feshie for a fantastic week of gliding and making us feel so welcome, as always.

- Yvonne Stott

