

Thermal Stuff: Destination

By Robin Robinson

As you remember, the last article left our glider in the air at about 600 feet of altitude heading toward the 'destination' that was selected before the launch sequence began. Your timer has started the stopwatch in order to track your task time. Whatever that task is, you know your glider will be on the ground within three minutes if you fail to find lift or 'rising air'.

A destination is best determined before launching. It is imperative that the destination be decided 'finally' within one minute of the start of the launch. This is why the moments before launch, while you are waiting in line, are so important to the outcome of the up-coming flight. These moments are best described as 'quiet time' for the pilot and timer. Both will be watching, and observing in order to make a good launch destination decision. When hooking up the launch line to the glider, the pilot and timer will confer with each other and make the decision. It is best when both pilot and timer know where the glider will be headed to after the launch.

DESTINATION FACTORS: Let's take the bad situation first. [1] You have just been put at the head of the line for launching for some reason that you can't control, you're out of breath and no one else is in the air. Five minutes ago, the fellow you were timing for did well upwind at about 10 o'clock. It has been about 15 minutes since anything good has happened out at 2 o'clock so that is where you are going this time! You will do a launch straight upwind and then search to the right using upwind 'S' turns as you watch the glider for cues. When you get to the limit of visibility then move left toward the 10 o'clock position and continue around left until it is time to approach the landing area with enough altitude to make a normal textbook landing for maximum points. If you found lift during this search, you would have been able to complete the time task because the search was up-wind. Had the search been downwind, you may have had the added complication of being far, far away with low altitude at the end of the task.

Here is a better situation. [2] As you're waiting in line to launch, the three pilots ahead of you have found lift and are established in it at 9 o'clock with a very light wind shift also blowing into it! Would anyone wonder about where to go? There is a downside; if you're going to carry this round, don't miss the landing.

Try this. [3] The wind has shifted and is blowing lightly but steadily, more to the right than normal, it has not yet turned colder than average for the day though. I would launch and search out in the direction of 3 o'clock and then move carefully upwind watching the glider for clues.

Your personal 'launch destination factor list' will grow quickly if you spend a portion of each contest day running the retriever winch. As each contestant launches and completes the round task, you will be able to pick up on their strategy and measure their success for future use. On some days, you will notice a pattern in the way lift is cycling through the flying area. It goes something like this. Every 15 minutes a 'boomer' comes through within reach of the launch; left, right or straight ahead. If you're not in it you are out of luck for lift. Here is what you do. With five minutes to go to 'boomer time', call for a retriever

operator and go get your plane and a timer. Get in line and by the time you're ready to launch, a ten minute task thermal will be waiting for you!

IN CONCLUSION: Always make the launch with a destination in mind that is based on observation of factors taken or noticed within one minute of the actual launch time. Then, stick to the plan until interrupted by lift and don't forget; circle!