

# TEENS SPREAD THEIR WINGS

Katharine York reports why Lincolnshire GC teamed up with a training facility to give teenagers a taste of gliding



Paul Kerman instructs in the BGA simulator (Katharine York)

■ **Three companies working locally provided sponsorship to cover the costs of putting on this and the next event. The funding from 3Q Industrial Supplies, Skyform and Engie Fabricom made it possible to hire the simulator, insure the glider and meet all the other costs, so that the event could be free to attend.**

■ **In addition to the radio interview, the local newspaper sent a reporter and the local digital broadcaster sent a cameraman to film an item for the evening news.**

**C**OULD the thrill of gliding lure youngsters into careers in engineering? That was the thought when Lincolnshire Gliding Club teamed up with the engineering training facility HCF CATCH at Stallingborough, Lincolnshire.

Back in November, I tried to persuade the CATCH Education Manager, Sabine Homes, to take a flight and encourage girls to try flying. Despite her serious phobia of flying she was tempted – so tempted that we agreed to put on an event in the spring to give teenagers a taste of what gliding is all about. Our hidden agenda was to get the youngsters involved in team building, safety training and engineering at the same time!

The plot we hatched was to hold an activity day, targeting 14- 19-year-olds, with three main hooks – building a glider, flying a simulator and hearing about engineering apprenticeships.

It all went ahead during the Easter holidays in an event we branded The Wright Stuff. Forty places were offered to local

students, and the event was fully booked a month in advance through a combination of direct mailing to schools and word-of-mouth. Girls were particularly encouraged to get involved, being as poorly represented in engineering as in gliding: 10 signed up, making 25 per cent of the participants.

HCF CATCH has good connections with the local schools and colleges, and a dedicated marketing officer, which all helped in spreading the word. AIS Training let us have full use of a room big enough to pass as a hangar, providing dry, warm, well-lit and wind-free conditions for rigging. That said, it looked an awful lot smaller once a glider trailer was towed in!

LGC couldn't afford the risk of damage to the club's gliders, so a cry went out for an unflyable glider, with the thought of offering an active retirement to one of the ASK series that had failed its glue inspections. In the

end, a very elegant – and potentially flyable – Carmam and trailer were received on loan from Dave Mason of Mason Restorations. Fearing damage, we removed the canopy and stored it safely lest any harm befall it.

As the day neared, final preparations included towing the glider to the venue, followed by a six-hour round-trip to retrieve the BGA simulator from Bicester. Then with a little more time shunting trailers around the event space and head-scratching over the simulator instructions, the venue was ready to go.

The day started with a live interview on location, with David Talbot, CEO of HCF CATCH and myself, as secretary of LGC, speaking on Radio Humberside's Breakfast Show. Then at 9am, the first batch of students arrived.

After an introduction from David Talbot to set the scene and encourage them to think about the diverse opportunities offered in engineering, they were shown through to the workshop. We divided them into two groups of 10, and they spent about an hour with either the simulator or glider, switching over after a short break for refreshments.

I ran a quick manual handling training session and got my team started getting the Carmam out of its trailer and rigged as if for flight. Meanwhile, on the other side of the room, LGC member Paul Kerman gave a flight briefing and started on the first of many introductory flights.

We were warned beforehand not to expect much from our groups, and it's true that they were all shy both with us and each other. With a bit more time in the day perhaps a group ice-breaking exercise would have got them going sooner. Still, they all pitched in willingly, and coped more patiently than many adult teams I have seen trying to get wings to line up – perhaps because they had no expectations! The Carmam is so light that by the end of the day even the more slightly built were taking the load, but the wings were fiddly to get in place, and having so many helpers probably didn't help that



Top: team effort to load the wing. Above left: CATCH education manager Sabine Homes still a bit terrified. Above right: making the connections (Katharine York)

stage – give me a K-6 or a K-8 any day!

Over at the simulator, they were getting the feel of the controls and marvelling at the size of the cockpit. Some had flown with the ATC, but most were completely new to gliding and several showed real promise.

We closed the session with a summary of all the benefits of gliding, and the possible careers in aviation they might consider. They walked out delighted, and

the organisers – although exhausted – felt much the same, and are already considering a follow-up. We hope to see some new faces at gliding clubs in the area and signing up for apprenticeships soon.

Our heartfelt thanks to all those involved.

■ The next event, High Flying Girls, will encourage more women and girls to try gliding. Twenty new flyers take to the skies above Lincolnshire on 31 May.

## MAKING IT WORK

THE idea will generate interest both with schoolchildren and media. Make the most of the chance to talk about how easy and exciting it is to get involved with gliding.

Use who you know. It helped that I had a variety of ways of getting attention from schoolteachers, as I have hosted a number of work experience placements and industrial visits in my worklife, and I know people who go in to some of the more deprived schools in the area who are desperate to raise aspirations amongst local youngsters.

Find a partner with a shared or overlapping interest. In this case it was raising the profile of engineering – partly through a business need, mostly through a passion for the field.

Get several volunteers from your club to take part, as gliders can be fiddly beasts and sometimes need firm handling by a small number of experienced people just to get the last bits together! A few more people on site would also have spared my voice!

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