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Gliding Australia
The Gliding Federation of Australia Inc.
trading as Gliding Australia

Operations Advice Notice

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Canopy Safety Alert

Background: Gliding Australia (GAus) Safety, Operations and Airworthiness teams have reviewed and analysed canopy related occurrences and causal factors. Whilst the consequences of occurrences have often been nil or minimal, there have been some serious distractions, damage and serious consequences, and many occurrences where canopy issues have cascaded and increased other operational risks.

This safety alert focusses on operational measures to reduce the probability of such incidents, particularly for Grob Astir and Twin Astir gliders. A separate Airworthiness Alert will address technical and maintenance aspects.

Introduction: Canopy uncommanded release occurrences

GAus has completed an analysis of uncommanded canopy releases since September 2011. There have been 60 occurrences.

25 – Interrupted checks
11 – Not locked correctly
7 – Release manipulated accidentally
5 – Worn canopy locking mechanism
4 – Canopy replaced. Not fitted correctly
2 – Puchacz AN170 related
1 – Canopy strobe fitting fouled canopy
4 – Under investigation

19 occurrences were in Grob Astir, Twin or Twin Acro types.

There is a disproportional number of occurrences relating to the Astir family of gliders. GAus Safety, Airworthiness and Operations have looked at these occurrences and worked closely with clubs across Australia who have had uncommanded releases in this family of aircraft. Pilots have been interviewed. Pictures and videos have been taken of various gliders. Advice and suggestions have been provided by clubs and owners.

Addressing Causal Issues: There is a range of causal pathways leading to canopy opening in flight occurrences, or canopy not latched securely. Airworthiness causes e.g. buckled frames and hinges, weak or broken springs, bent securing rods and tubes, dirt, friction etc are addressed in an Airworthiness Alert.

Operational, human factors and organisational causes can include:

- Foreign object interference in canopy frame or latch causing misalignment
- Temperature effects of canopy frame or latch

- Dirt or grit, dried lubricants impeding latch rod moving into the fully latched position
- Lapses in Daily Inspections or normalised deviance in accepting gradually degrading operation
- Worn metal and old paint, lack of visual cues to highlight correct closure of rods and latches in the fuselage
- Unintended errors or lapses in pre-flight cockpit checks
- Lack of sterile cockpit or sterile launch point allowing distraction or interruption
- Rushed actions, complacency, or confirmation bias, seeing what we want to see
- Fatigue and related issues impeding vigilance
- Air loads, turbulence, vibration
- Unintended activation by people in cockpit.

A Sterile Cockpit and Sterile Launch Point – an antidote to distractions and interruptions.

A large contributor to uncommanded canopy openings is interrupted checks, often due to distraction or diversion. Pilots recount being distracted or interrupted during the CHAOTIC check and then starting where they remember being interrupted. Here is where errors and lapses can occur.

It is important that if a check is interrupted, ***the pilot must restart the checklist*** from the beginning rather than trying to pick up part-way through. This is part of "sterile cockpit/check discipline" training.

"I thought I had locked the canopy... ...but I must not have".
A common statement by pilots

Pilots often report that they thought they had closed the canopy release. In the Astir family the locking system is the same. It is a simple system. The canopy is secured by a spring-loaded sliding locking bolt actuated by the canopy control lever knob, marked red. The locking bolt passes through three cylinders. Two are mounted on the canopy and one on the fuselage. The cylinders are in sets with one set forward and the other rear.

It is vital for the PIC to confirm the canopy is actually locked and unable to be lifted prior to launch. The latch rod must be fully forward and engaged in the retaining tubes in the cockpit. It is easy for the handle to be in the locked position and the rod not correctly engaged. See below!

This canopy is not locked!

Sterile launch points require discipline and vigilance on the flight line, from all pilots and members, not just instructors. This includes careful management of ground movements, vehicles, visitors and external distractions. A calm and disciplined environment is conducive to better safety; a noisy and chaotic launch point is potentially hazardous.

Other Risk Reduction Measures: We are aware many clubs use pre-launch challenge and response checks immediately prior to launch. These are not standardised, and opinions on their veracity differ widely. The Operations and Airworthiness Panels will consider pre-launch actions and workflows, CARD checks and variants in the near future.

Further work will focus on associated training issues, O for OUTSIDE checks and contingency plans for launch failure or other low-level events. Further Operations Safety Bulletin advice is likely, once airworthiness, operations and training systems aspects are assessed.

Actions: This email is sent to RMOs, CFIs and DCFIs. Please ensure the OAN is sent to your club instructors.

Regards

D.B. (Dave) Boulter
Executive Manager Operations
24th April 2026