

MASTERING PARAGLIDING (A review)

Thud! Sometime during June or July an unsolicited copy of Kelly Farina's, **Mastering Paragliding**, dropped onto the doormat. I think I was meant to review it, but that part of the deal was unclear.

To be honest, aside from skimming through it, I didn't think it would be any different in style, format or content than similar books that preceded it. Books such as Burkard Martens series (**Cross-Country Flying and Thermal Flying**) and more recently Bruce Goldsmiths (**Fifty Ways to Fly**



Better) would be hard to beat. How could Kelly's book be any different? Those books set the bar high and should be on every serious pilot's bookshelf of essential reading. Written by pilots of impeccable credentials, they explain all you need to know, and impart their wisdom with excellent illustrations and diagrams. So Is there really room for another book that essentially does the same thing?

My hurried early dismissal of Kelly Farina's, **Mastering Paragliding** was unforgivable – I even loaned it out for a while. Perhaps the positive feedback I got on its return, from someone who has all the other books out there to make comparisons with, rekindled my interest. The result has been to get into Kelly's book in a deeper way, a way the other books never quite did in a single word it's – refreshing. It's difference is its appeal. The style is engaging, the take on things often very different and Farina-esque and the anecdotes range from amusing to gripping (“winds of 40km/h plus70- 80% collapses backwards towards the ridge 8M/s up to 9m/s down I was visibly shaking and sick!) and all that within a few meagre sentences. Peppared throughout the book are all manner of little gems and saying, many new to me, others the sort of random thoughts that we all have “Don't play the odds, monkey see, monkey do”. And all this intertwined with a 'new' terminology that explains things as only Kelly Farina seems able – it works wonderfully.

A brief word about Kelly.

Well known to most pilots reading this, but perhaps less so to newer pilots. Many would claim to know him personally having been on his guided flying holidays, a few have occasionally felt his sharp tongue, but the overwhelming majority speak of the amount they have learned and how they've been pushed to be better. Kelly has been flying for over 20 years. Until the emergence



of 2 liner wings he often competed on the world circuit, but his main focus for the past 12 years has been running coaching and guiding courses through his company, Austrian Arena. Having lived and flown in the southern Alps for 20 years, now resident and based in Bassano, his knowledge of the area, its sites and weather systems is impeccable. His ability to coax the best out of pilots and accelerate their progress is renown. **Mastering Paragliding** is long awaited and encapsulates his huge wealth of experience.

I have all the books previously mentioned, and each has taught me a lot so it's hard to avoid comparison. They all tend to do the same thing, but in different ways. The Burkhard Marten's series I tend to regard as textbooks, a little dry in places, but jam-packed with knowledge and information, you can dive in almost anywhere and pull out a nugget. Bruce Goldsmith's book seems a lighter read, a bit less 'heavy' yet full of useful information, but perhaps aimed at a slightly different audience who just want the essentials in an uncluttered, uncomplicated way. It depends where you are on the learning curve, the depth you want to go into things and how it all fits with the sort of flying you aspire to.

Mastering Paragliding sits somewhere between the two. For me it's the best 'read' of the set, I love the style and I especially love the language used to describe anything from technique to weather. I don't know if Kelly made up some of the terms and phrases he uses, I don't recall coming across many before – especially in books on meteorology. The main thing is they work as suitable descriptors for types of air (fizzy/sticky), regions (cheese or olives) styles (carving the line) etc. Another thing I like is that Kelly has the confidence to challenge accepted ways of doing things or at least doing them a little differently. For example efficient piloting of a wing (pitch control) during high speed glide. Is it subtle speed bar changes, rear riser control or a combination of both? Kelly would seem to have his own thoughts when I compare it to similar sections in the other textbooks. I think you take from each and apply what works best for you. He's certainly his own man with his own ideas.

Kelly's book follows a logical order and everything is built around his pyramid of progression. Unlike other books, it devotes more space to take off techniques and doesn't simply take them as a given. There are diagrams illustrating the reverse launch with tips and pitfalls, the forward launch, "thou shalt not hack!" and different methods of holding the brakes. Even after all my years I still like to be reminded of other or better ways and even have occasionally some confirmation that I may be doing something right or getting a slap on the wrist. From that point we're into the 'black art' of thermal flight with all that entails in terms of carving, mapping and the concepts involved. And don't get me started on the weather and the horrors of the Fohn! I won't give anymore away, but you have been warned.

Like all the books mentioned it comes at a price about £25, but is good value in terms of the payback in advice and help it will give you. I know many pilots have the full set – still good value, but if you could only afford a single one this would be my choice. The reason? Well the photos on this type of printing paper aren't brilliant, the diagrams are OK, but above all, I began as a sceptic, and once I got my nose into the book I fell for Kelly's style of telling it like it is – no messing.

A bit like the man himself.

