

## REVIEW:

## - VOLT (M)

Air Design is a relatively new entrant to the increasingly crowded paraglider market, however their designs have a firmly rooted pedigree in Stephan Stiegler, previously designer with UP and a very short transitional spell with Airwave before its breakup. The resulting fallout seems to have led to the formation of Air Design; a new team with Stephan as key to the design side. Using his proven talents, both as designer and world class pilot, one would expect any Air Design wing to have his hallmark handling and performance. With the class leading Pure (EN D) as their opening gambit that seems to have been the case and a stable of other sweet gliders are now building on that foundation.



We are fortunate in having arrived at a point where every manufacturer/wing you purchase tends to be very good and of the highest quality; even so, you still go out on a limb a little with a new manufacturer. After years of flying Ozone wings (M2, M3, M4 and R10) it was slightly risky to try something of the unknown, especially as the Mantra series had, for me set the benchmark in terms of performance and handling very high. Had the M5 not been delayed, I may well not have made the switch. That change

was to the Volt, probably inspired by Hugh Miller's excellent XC magazine review and also to try something a little different and an EN C better suited to the type of flying I do and because they seem to have caught up to many of the established EN D's (excluding the newer two liners).

I'm no seasoned reviewer and this is very much a personal review of the Volt. I've held back until I've got a good few hours – about 25hrs; under conditions ranging from smooth ridge soaring to some very gnarly Spring thermals and XC's. I can only make comparisons with my previous gliders, and with those being Ozone wings which I've always found outstanding, that does set the bar very high – it's important that is borne in mind.



I took delivery one afternoon in late February, on a very pleasant, early Spring day. During the morning I'd flown the R10 and arrived back to find a surprisingly small box – not sure why I expected it to be bigger. With enough daylight

remaining, there was just enough time to rush out for a look at the custom colours and at least do some groundhandling – as it turned out it was soarable enough for a few flights.

The specs for the wing can be found via the AD website – so I won't dwell on those and instead comment on some of the basics and groundhandling. I'm used to slim risers, but these had a few



extra touches including a more complex speed system than I'm used to, which on the (unusually) split A's pulls the centre two A's more than the outer on a 2:1 line (not pulley) system. I presume this makes it especially tuck resistant, with the outer wing less likely to go first ..... certainly I've pushed the bar to its

limits for prolonged periods, more than any other glider, with never a hint of trouble – and that's in some snotty air. I've mixed feelings about the 'balls' for C riser steering and given a choice would prefer the Delta 2 handles, if only because they are so good for A/C launches, allowing only a two finger grip. I find the balls a bit retro. I must admit the sheathed lower lines and excellent colour coding are a really pleasant change after years of sorting unsheathed lines and avoiding damaging them.

Groundhandling is so easy it's a non-event – by whichever method is used, in fact one's technique could get rather lazy and I do miss a bit of the spice and challenge of a wing that requires a bit more attention – although not as much as the R10! From lines that don't knot up, to a clean inflation whether forward or reverse it's a well-balanced and fuss-free wing and that's all the comment that's required. No foibles at all from nil wind to fresh winds.

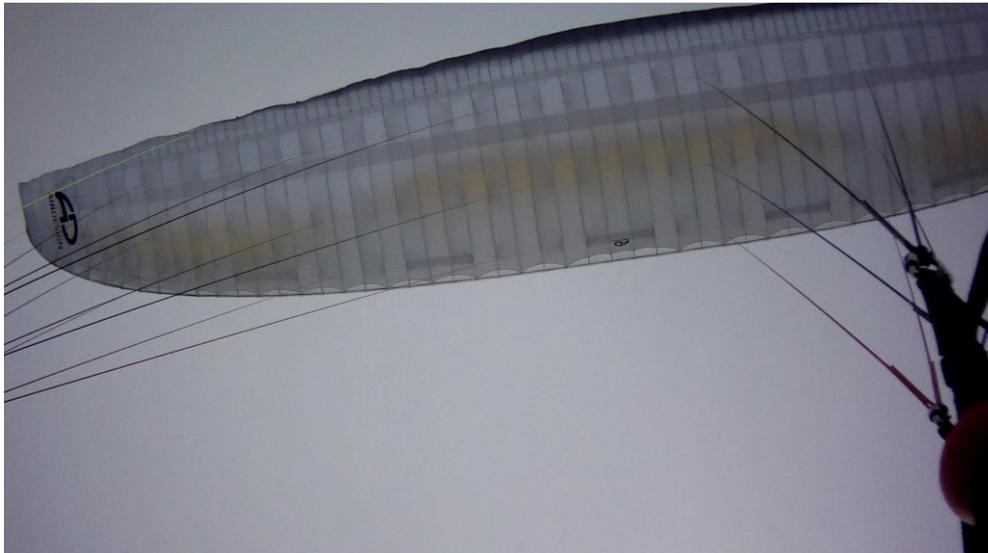
Once in the air the handling feels very Mantra-like except for two important differences which I've now come to terms with. The handling is very direct to the point of being quite hard or physical – this may suit some, but I found it a little tiring after a while. It's not a problem in any way but I feel I'm now using more weight-shift to compensate which



makes turning a little easier. As for the cross body braking, that is second nature, as most Ozone gliders tend to need that technique to get them to turn quickly – and I like doing it that way and having that option. It's agile enough when scratching, but with a very slight delay that was absent

on the Mantra's – including the R10. I'm not one to throw gliders around and probably not qualified to comment too much on its agility, but if you do like to get a bit radical then I don't think this is the glider for you. The Volt is primarily an XC wing and a very solid, safe and capable one at that – it didn't drop into spirals easily, but once in was very controllable and predictable on exit.

It may be that stepping down to an EN C has psychologically changed my mind-set, but little things that may have given cause for concern now have a lowered stress factor – I may be duping myself here. I'm now very happy to hammer along on full bar and tweak the C's – where I was more reluctant before. In fact the glide seems remarkable good for its class – and I include the classic, older EN D's in that statement. On glide it feels the same as the M4, but I do feel it loses a little on sink rate; or at least my ability to squeeze the best out of weak lift. I'm flying it all-up at the very top of the weight range (Medium 90 – 105kg), maybe slightly over, so that may be having some effect. Comparisons are pretty pointless, but against the two EN C's that I've flown with and which impressed me – the Trango XC2 and the Tala it holds its own. The Delta 2 – I'm pretty sure is still top of its class – just ; in terms of handling and performance. Perhaps I should qualify that statement as aboard the one I'm most likely to fly near is one of the best pilots in the world on a D2 so it may flatter to deceive a little.



Overall, I enjoy flying the Volt and its very friendly character would make it a great first EN C for a decent pilot moving up. In terms of piloting I'd put it at the lower end of the EN C; performance

wise in the middle of the current batch and on glide alone near the top. It has no quirks or little idiosyncrasies and is a well-made and designed glider in all respects – almost to the point of lacking a little character. Comment is often is made about the dangers when moving up – moving down also brings its dangers and I need to be careful of taking liberties with it to squeeze that little extra out of it. Had the lightweight version (about 30% lighter) been out before I ordered I would probably have gone for that instead as the medium tops 6kg – doesn't feel that heavy in the bag though.

### **Summary:**

Medium Volt (90 – 105kg) flown at 105/107kg; Ava Sport Tanto harness

- Easy predictable take-off in all conditions
- Excellent speed system – moderate force required – smooth
- Moderately hard brakes with good feedback – not over-sensitive

- Turns tight with use of cross brake steering
- Easy to big ear but considerable force to get bigger ears using B risers
- Excellent glide, sink rate OK
- Not especially agile, but very good thermal xc wing – feels thermals well.
- Well designed bag, but material is lightweight, not sure how long it will last
- Air bag – don't like! May be personal thing so using Ozone Sauscise. Outer strap a nuisance!
- Excellent colour coding on lines – and sheathed lowers
- Attractive colour scheme and options
- I'd like it to have been a bit lighter – sub 6kg
- Wish I'd known about lightweight option

I have no dealer connections – if anyone in the UK wishes to see or fly mine they are welcome.

My flightlog with pics is on my website and the odd bit of video I've got around to semi-editing.

Ed Cleasby

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