

Going up in a glider

*Glider*s are planes without engines. We sent our reporter to find out what it's like to fly in one.

When I arrive at the London Gliding School, Adrian, a volunteer instructor who has been gliding for ten years, warmly greets me. He immediately takes me off to what's clearly the centre of all operations – the cafeteria. After a quick chat, we drive to the launch base where Dan, my instructor for the day, begins to prepare me on all I need to know. Dan, who is twenty, did his first solo flight at eighteen after joining the club's cadet scheme.

Going through all the theory of how everything works and what to do once airborne seems pretty simple. I'm not so keen, though, on the instructions about what to do in an emergency. **(1)**..... At least I'm wearing a parachute!

The glider is connected by rope to a light aircraft as we're pulled up into the air. A bumpy start along the field and we're off and up. 'I like it when people scream' were Dan's words on the ground. **(2)**..... But I am fiercely gripping my parachute straps and lots of noises are coming from my stomach, which is doing somersaults. Once we're up to around 1,500 feet, the rope is detached with a clunk from the underside of the glider and we're free.

It's a strange feeling – there's a sense of safety when the rope is attached to the aeroplane. **(3)**..... 'I am in control,' Dan tells me. He's not attempting to be heroic; this is glider talk. 'You are in control,' I respond. Thankfully I'm not or I doubt we'd be swooping through the peaceful skies so smoothly and effortlessly. Something you notice straightaway is the lack of an engine, which results in an eerie silence.

The weather conditions aren't ideal, as it's an all-too-familiar grey English day. **(4)**..... But I'm told that, with perfect weather conditions of a clear windy day and lots of cumulus cloud, we'd be able to catch the thermals and rise, staying

up in the air for longer. It's possible to glide as far as Scotland and back again with the right conditions!

In a glider both pilot and passenger have a set of controls, so either person can take control. The passenger can also 'follow through' with the controls, basically lightly touching all their own controls and feeling what the pilot is doing. (5)..... So when Dan tells me 'You are in control' and I repeat 'I am in control,' I'm glad he can't see the terror in my face. After some jumpy manoeuvres to keep the glider at 'normal gliding attitude,' where the horizon remains at a constant level, I'm just getting into the swing of it when Dan regains control to bring us in for landing.

Landing a glider is much calmer than other types of aircraft. (6)..... You descend and approach the landing area, deploying the spoilers (flaps on the wings) to weaken the air flow, and ease the glider lower until the wheels make contact and you're gently bumping along the field. I absolutely loved it and can't wait to get back up in the air.

- A** This doesn't make a jot of difference to the experience for me.
- B** Release the safety belts and jump out seems to be the only response possible.
- C** This has been the limit of my involvement so far.
- D** Once it goes, I feel I want to hold onto something in case we start falling to the ground.
- E** He tells me that it's too cloudy for those acrobatics, however, and relief washes over me.
- F** I manage not to do this, however.
- G** It's much less sudden and you notice the absence of engine roar.