

Skyman Cross Country

BILL MORRIS REPORTS

Most pilots will associate Skyman with lightweight paragliding and X-Alps type exploits, in which they have a distinguished track record. Superfit mountain-man Toma Cocone, a member of the Skyman team, has been in every X-Alps since its inception. Led by Markus Gründhammer, photographer extraordinaire, Skyman is the sister company to Independence under the Flymarket banner.

Photo: Markus Gründhammer/Skyman



Skyman led with the ultra-light, high-end EN C Cross Alps, but have now expanded into the general paragliding market with the Cross Country and slightly heavier and lower aspect ratio Heartbeat. The Cross Country aims to be a good EN/LTF B all-rounder while retaining the lightweight signature. At just a tad over 4kg on the M model (80 - 105kg) I flew you can certainly feel the difference on your back, especially if coupled with a lightweight or speedwing harness. The reduced pack volume of lightweight gliders is often overlooked; it is really nice to slog up the hill with a small

pack and on some days the XC went in my speedwing bag.

Much of this weight saving has been achieved by using a D10 fabric. A quick lecture here in case D10 is seen as a code or brand number. The D stands for denier, a unit of measure for the linear mass density of fibres. The yarn is still made out of high-tenacity Nylon 6.6 but the D defines the main difference in the fabrics – the thickness of the yarn used. Typically a D30 fabric is 42g/m²; D20 is 30g/m² and this D10 is 22g/m². Dominico D10 is a nice material

to touch –very slinky – and shows colour well; note the whole-block colouring of these wings.

Three line levels and some ingenuity on the risers (more of this anon) further assists the weight saving. The construction is very neat on close examination, and I was surprised to find that the distinctive Skyman logo was cut and sewn in as complete parts of the panels rather than stencilled or printed on. Quite a task on top and bottom surface but very distinctive. It certainly puts the brand name out there –



Specification

Model	XS	S	M	L
No of cells	55	55	55	55
Span (projected, m)	8.64	9.01	9.36	9.70
Area (flat, m ²)	23.0	25.0	27.0	29.0
Aspect ratio	5.7:1	5.7:1	5.7:1	5.7:1
Glider weight (kg)	3.65	3.90	4.10	4.35
All-up weight range (kg)	60 - 80	70 - 90	80 - 105	100 - 125
EN/LTF certification	B	B	B	B
Guarantee	12 months faulty materials and workmanship			
Price	£2,675	£2,725	£2,755	£2,835

UK importer: Skyman gliders are jointly distributed in the UK by Airworks and Simon Murphy at Turfhouse, who kindly supplied the wing for our test.

Airworks: The Old Station, Glynde, East Sussex BN9 6SS, tel: 01273 434002/07917 108858, e-mail: info@airworks.co.uk, website: www.airworks.co.uk.

Turfhouse: Turfhouse, Luppitt, Honiton, Devon EX14 4SA, tel: 01404 891685, e-mail: simon@turfhouse.com, website: www.turfhouse.com.

there is no mistaking these wings amongst others! Some pilots are cautious about lightweight fabrics, but the lessons in care and treatment are the same for all weights: be cautious of light and heat, do not drag them and put them away dry.

It would be a mistake to think that amongst all this concentration on weight the XC is a simple wing. Far from it: the leading edge is a series of shaped, wire-formed patterns and the inner load bearers also use wire to spread and shape the load instead of the traditional mylar type D patterns. The trailing edge has sewn mini ribs right across. The speed system on the riser has ceramic rings on the secondary group but pulleys are used on the main set and brakes (the jury is still out on the wear that rings can cause).

I have a tiny bitch about the brake line being the same colour as the A lines - some of us are quite simple folk. Fabric soft-links are used to join the lines to the risers instead of metal quick-links. These are becoming very common these days, almost standard on many brands. They have been around in rope work for years, and properly used are very safe. The weight advantage they offer is considerable.

A quirky, unique feature is little spikes in pockets on the leading edge as an aid for holding down on snow launches. Overall, build-wise, the XC exudes the sort of high-quality that should be standard these days.

On to the flying, starting with the launching. Having handled very light wings like the Ozone Ultralite and Adrenaline BatLite as well as more standard lightweights like the Ozone Geo, I agree with the now-common observation that lighter wings make launching different. In addition, the different stiffening in such wings means that you do not go for the traditional rigid, hard wall on reverse launch but float them up as they inflate.

After line sorting the XC can be pulled up without much prior building. Confidence in being able to do this means that you do not have to drag the wing about on the ground, just get it off the floor and inflate it more when half up. It helps that the XC is very stable over your head, more like launching a kite than an old-school paraglider. There is no need for a strong pull but it is not a self-launching glider, thank goodness. More than anything it came up simply and straight.

No snatch is needed on forward launch; the initial push on the risers is light, but about halfway up you get some feedback force. I mention this because if you envisage launching on a restricted mountain top, the popular running-backwards reverse launch may not be suitable; an Alpine launch may be needed to see where you are going. For the hike-and-fly brigade, who will be going to places never flown before rather than well-established club launches, this is a very valuable feature. I did a run-off-fast, no-wind launch with great confidence, and also floated the wing above my head in a very light wind with the brakes nearly full on.





If you want a really comprehensive breakdown of every aspect of flight testing, have a look at the EAPR Flight Test Report produced by test pilots Mike Kung and Mario Eder, far better pilots than I and working to a set series of exercises. As in this case, I like glider reports where the word 'spontaneous' is used a lot. These formal tests are far more comprehensive than I could cover, but they match my experience of a very comfortable wing with few surprises.

The XX is the sort of wing that you fly around thinking about piloting decisions, not worrying about what the wing is doing, in other words very reassuring and enabling. Brake pressures are comfortable, brake travel is generous and big arm deflections are very safe. Wingovers built very easily and recovered without having to do anything.

I tried the speed system with a plate harness. It does what it should, deflects easily and gives more speed. Ears come off a single line on a single outer riser. You might wonder if it's even worth commenting on, but this simplicity is because there are just two A lines and you are pulling exactly half of them in. I felt the ears were very controlled, needing maybe a slight stab to get out at the very end, but everything was even and easy to do.

On landings I could be very mobile with far too much S-turning, and able to land in

small spots without mushing in; the wing floated well for this. The XC grew on me more and more and I stopped thinking about it as a specialist, narrow-market wing.

It may be crawling with lightweight features and branded as such, but in the end it turned out to be a very nice wing to fly, and one that could be trusted and flown with confidence. You might well enjoy it emerging from your snow cave at the top of a snow-covered peak – many will – but in reality few of us will get that privilege. Many more would enjoy it just doing some flying. It certainly did not feel inferior in terms of performance in the B class; it climbs very easily and reached everything I wanted to glide to. Really it is a good-performing wing, just lighter.

Summary

The paraglider market is a crowded and competitive one, each firm and each glider trying to show an angle or unique selling point. Skyman's USP is light weight and mountain-friendly use and the XC does this extremely well. The danger is that the label will persuade pilots that this is all there is to it. Certainly a reduction in size and weight – and the crippling expansion of glider bags and luggage fees – has got to be a good thing for some of us if, as in the case of the Skyman Cross Country, there is no price to pay in terms of performance. If you are looking for a reliable, safe wing of this ilk you could do far worse.

