

flight test: **Advance Epsilon 9** DAVE SOUTHERN REPORTS

I consider myself very privileged to be involved in this sport, and not least to have the opportunity to fly a range of paragliders from various manufacturers. Paradoxically, in recent years I have rarely had the opportunity to fly gliders rated below high B, despite these being the most popular. I recall flying Advance's Epsilon 4 in 2002, and more recently reviewing the Epsilon 7 in 2013, and found it to be enormously fun to fly and a very able glider. When I had the opportunity, late last summer, to test the Epsilon 9 I was very keen to see what advances (!) had been made in this latest iteration of the series.

3 two-liner. The ultralight Pi2 (EN A/B) and the acro Omikron make up the full complement of solo gliders.

In early October I met Valéry Chapuis of Advance at Interlaken to speak all things Epsilon and to test fly the E9. I am fortunate enough to have a base in neighbouring Valais, and the journey to

already in the air, I was eager to get off the ground.

Don't spread the word, but flying in Switzerland in early October can be amazing, with stunning views and lovely big lazy thermals. It can however deliver all the four seasons in one. The day was cold, cloudless and sunny, but the very

Grindelwald. It's a place I've never actually managed to fly that has always been high on my list. Grindelwald is dominated by the Bernese triptych of the Mönch, Jungfrau and Eiger, the north face of which has been the scene of many mountaineering triumphs and tragedies. I collected the E9 from Valéry's car, packed my pod harness and we headed up to the First gondola station.

The Epsilon is delivered with the Comfortpack 3, which is fairly universal to the entire Advance range. In my opinion – and that of many of my flying friends – the Comfortpack is the best paragliding rucksack on the market. I fly mainly in the north of England (Pennines, Dales and Lakes), where big walk-ups are the norm and a rucksack which carries well is essential.

The 115-litre Comfortpack more than swallowed up the Epsilon 9 30, my pod, down jacket and all the other niff-naff I have accumulated as my flying 'essentials'.

At the First cable car station we were some way above the snow line at 2150m, and about 15cm of fresh snow had settled. The take-off is on a short spur into the valley and it was apparent that the wind was off by about 45 degrees. It was clearly going to be a good test of ground handling! Waiting for conditions to improve gave me time for a good inspection of the glider.

Out of the bag

The E9 has sporty, slim risers with colour coding for ease of connecting the wing to the harness. It has magnetic poppers on the brake handles, which Advance utilise fairly universally in their standard-weight wings. The semi-light design puts the 26m medium at around 4.5kg and my 30m at a very respectable 5.25kg. The E9 is now produced in five sizes compared to the E8's four, catering for all-up weights from 65 - 128kg. In the air, from the ground, the glider looks rather more racy than its 5.2:1 aspect ratio suggests.

The E9 sports the elliptical cells common throughout the Advance range, with a shark nose or air scoop, sliced diagonals and internalised mini ribs, which Advance say smooth the trailing edge without the drawback of snagging stitching on rough ground. There are two more cells than the E8 and a resultant slight reduction in cell size. Porcher Skytex 38 is used throughout, as are covered Dyneema lines up to the galleries where they are uncovered Aramid.

In the air

The wind didn't play ball unfortunately and we ended up taking off slightly crosswind. No issues at all for the E9 however. With a forward launch diagonally across snowy ground, it came up impeccably and sat over my head whilst I generated enough speed for take-off. Once I had settled into my pod I became aware of the excellent feedback from the E9. Note, it is not at all nervy, far from it, rather a joy to fly.

Interlaken through the Lötschberg tunnel via Adelboden has to be one of the finest journeys in the Alps. Arriving at the Lehn landing field at the end of the Thunersee and seeing the local tandem pilots

Autumn first snow had fallen above 1500m. It would be thermic!

I had anticipated staying local, but Valéry suggested that with the day's météo the best place to look would be First at

All photos: ©Felix Woelk



Advance should need no introduction, having been established in 1988 at the very naissance of our sport. They are based at Thun in the Bernese Oberland, a Mecca for free flying. The Epsilon 9 is a mid EN B

aimed at a broad spectrum of pilots, from 'second buys' moving on – often from the EN A Alpha 6 school/first glider – to more seasoned pilots who, for various reasons, are stepping down but still looking for that

elusive combination of real-world XC potential and relaxing flying.

At high B there is the Iota 2 and its lightweight cousin the Xi, followed by the EN C Sigma 10 and the EN D Omega X-Alps

At the time I took off, there were already three or four gliders in the air over a bank of forest at the top of a ridge which was clearly generating thermals. As readers will know, when you fly a different glider at first, your calibration for glide and speed can be way out, but not in this instance. The E9's glide and speed was easily comparable to the higher-rated gliders I was flying with. On reaching the ridge I entered a small thermal with two other gliders. The E9 thermals very intuitively and needed little input to keep it from pitching; it is very stable overhead which will clearly suit its target market.

As it was late season, the thermals soon dissipated and I went to land. High over the landing field, I tried some manoeuvres. Big ears came in and out easily. Wingovers were quickly generated and easily exited, as were mild spirals.

We packed away in the landing field. As I was returning to the UK I expected to have few opportunities to fly again before I was back in Switzerland in mid-January. I was wrong!

Soon after I returned, the unlikely confluence of an empty work diary and a flyable day gave me the opportunity to have another blast on the E9. This time it was at one of my old haunts, Parlick. A moderate easterly was blowing as I arrived, and anyone who knows the hill will be aware that in an easterly there can be quite a strong 'compression'.

This would give me the chance to try a strong(ish) wind reverse launch. I was aware from the manual that the E9 launches quickly and I was ready to damp a surge. In fact I didn't find the the speed the wing came up in any way overwhelming, perhaps because of the glider I currently fly. Nevertheless I did note that the glider has a 'low' stall point – i.e. long brake travel.

It was peculiar day, clear overhead with an encroaching bank of cloud. As the wind was quite strong I kept well out and

Specification

Model	22	24	26	28	30
No. of cells	47	47	47	47	47
Span (projected, m)	8.26	8.59	8.94	9.26	9.59
Area (flat, m²)	22.1	23.9	25.9	27.8	29.8
Aspect ratio	5.2:1	5.2:1	5.2:1	5.2:1	5.2:1
Max. chord (m)	2.59	2.69	2.80	2.90	3.00
Glider weight (kg)	4.15	4.40	4.65	4.95	5.25
Certificated weight range (kg)	60 - 77	70 - 88	80 - 100	92 - 114	105 - 128
Recommended weight range (kg)	65 - 75	75 - 85	85 - 97	97 - 110	110 - 125
EN/LTF Certification	B	B	B	B	B
Guarantee	3 years materials and workmanship				
Price	£3,470	£3,470	£3,470	£3,470	£3,470

UK distribution: Available from all UK Advance dealers or go to www.advance.ch (test glider supplied by Advance, Thun)



found nice thermals which, surprisingly, were better than those I had encountered at First. On this occasion I had a considerably longer flight and, as the cloud arrived, a wide band of lift allowing me to thermal to base and back for over an hour. Bizarrely for Parlick, there was only one other pilot enjoying this late-season gift. This flight really gave me the chance to get to know the glider and to enjoy what is clearly a fine wing.

It has been said that there are pilots who have stuck with the Epsilon series without ever flying anything else. Flying the E9 I can quite see why. This glider would keep most pilots content, whether they be ridge-bashers or XC hounds. In the right hands I have no doubt that the E9 is capable of 100k plus flights.

A week later I had another – almost Groundhog Day! – flight at Parlick. The same wind strength, same direction and thermic. That day I flew over ground I've

never reached before in over 20 years. The conditions played a major part, but the E9 played its part too.

Summary

You will have gathered from the foregoing that I was very impressed with the E9 and pleasantly surprised at all aspects of its performance. I would certainly fly it here in the UK for XC and, equally, take it to any of the Fieschs or St Andrés of this world.

The E9's target market is progression pilots, coming from the Alpha or similar, weekend pilots and those who look for security and stability with no trade-off in performance. I think it hits those targets with a bullseye...

