

Elf Flight Story by Neil Stainton

On 3rd May we had a beautiful day here, with almost no wind, and blue skies. There wasn't a cloud to be seen, but the conditions were obviously thermic, and on the third chuck I caught some gentle lift over the adjacent field and started working it. I am lucky living in the middle of the UK, there are three full-size gliding clubs within 10 miles of here, and I quite often see full size sailplanes fly over. I have a Jeti box on my transmitter that displays info from the vario sensor realtime, and as the model was climbing through 100m I saw a full size glider fly overhead, and idly wondered if it would join me. Of course it didn't but it did start circling a about mile away, then I lost site of it.

I carried on working the lift and had got to about 180m when another full size glider came over, and after a bit of it testing the air it started circling - in MY thermal! I have been joined by other models (often), by birds occasionally, but never by a full size sailplane before. It was great to watch both planes circling one above the other, with similar visual circle diameters and speeds. Of course the full size was a lot higher, but my Elf was really going up now and was getting hard to see. When I last glanced at the transmitter it was over 200m, but I didn't dare look away now, as it was glinting in and out of view each time it went round. Normally I would be apprehensive of taking the Elf so high but it was so beautiful to see the glider and the model going up together I didn't want to stop. (Also with the lack of wind I felt that if I lost sight I could spiral it down and have a good chance of re-acquiring it.) Suddenly my transmitter started beeping. I couldn't look at the telemetry info but it was presumably warning me that I was at the limit of the radio's range. So I put in full rudder and dived the Elf down - too far unfortunately and I didn't find any more lift. By the time I landed the full size had disappeared, but I checked the max height vario menu and found the model had climbed to 314m (1030 ft) above ground. Definably a record for me!

I was in a hurry to catch another thermal and a couple of launches later I heard the tip catch the long grass as I released. As the Elf climbed away I saw the wing dihedral increase to about 30 degrees. The model was totally controllable (in fact I circled a few times in good air), but when it landed I could see that the spar had broken at the centre. Hey ho, not an easy repair.

So my Elf had its best ever and worst flights within 10 minutes of each other. Maybe it was like Icarus, and it had climbed too high.

