

Mum's Birthday Present

Descente Parapente Biplacé



For her 54th birthday my son bought his mother a tandem hang-glider flight! To be fair it was all my fault - I mentioned that some years ago she had expressed a wish to try it - we had taken a cable car to the top of a mountain - I think at Megeve in France to look at Mont Blanc - and when we got off the cable car tandem hang-glider flights to the bottom of the mountain were on offer. We had declined and walked down the mountain. Several hours- and aching calves later my wife had said " I wish I had taken the offer of the flight" I told the story to my son - he stored it away - and now it came back to haunt me!

We were paying a flying visit to see him in the French Alps to celebrate my wife's birthday and to see if I could persuade the local doctor to take the longleg plaster off his girlfriends leg (she had fallen off her snow blades a month previously) (I failed) when Peter announced he has a surprise for his mother - 15 minutes warning of a dual hanglider flight!!

To be accurate, since we were in France - he had booked a "descente parapente biplacé" from the top of the mountain in Morzine in France back down to the valley floor.



She could have refused - I probably would have refused - but she didn't!!

Within minutes she was in a little blue French van and being whisked away to the top of the mountain. No time for regrets! We gave chase in the car

Thirty dizzying , high speed corners - and a very hot smelling car later we were at the launch site.

The nylon parapente wing was laid out on the snow, the instructor and Diana already in their harnesses, basic flight instructions given, - all that was needed was sufficient wind to get them off the ground. We waited for the wind. We waited for the wind.



There was a rudimentary windsock. It looked like five strands of metallic tape from an audio cassette - the kind you often see draped over hedges in the English countryside - stuck on a bit of stick - it was five strands of metallic tape from an audio cassette stuck on a bit of stick - but wind - none. We waited.

Finally the tapes moved, Diana and the instructor ran down the hill, lifted about 4 feet into the air - and crashed!!! I know the annual medical insurance isn't going to cover this!! No screams no noise at all - but movement. Diana and the instructor climb to their feet.



Now me - I would have chickened out - but my wife is made of sterner stuff!! Pick up the parapente, climb back up the hill - and try again!! I have always had considerable admiration for Diana - but watching her standing there ready to try again really made me very proud.



Finally the tapes moved again - and they made a second attempt. To be truthful it really didn't look any more successful than the first attempt, but finally they struggled into the air! But not soaring upwards into the sky! They gained speed, but not height and the trees at the end of the takeoff area seemed to be getting awfully close! At the last moment the parapente lifted and they cleared the tree tops - I'm still convinced they had to bend their knees to keep their feet out of the trees - but they were over the valley rim edge and flying free.



We ran back to the car and descended into the valley at high speed.

Remember those thirty dizzying high speed uphill corners - we now took them even faster downhill. My son has been in France for three months. He has acquired most of the standard Gallic road handling techniques - particularly the one most frightening to English drivers. If you have ever driven in mountainous areas in France you will know it well.

For those who have not -

Rule 1 (for driving on dizzyingly curved mountain roads in France) for Local Drivers only: Always drive with at least one third of your vehicle on the wrong side of the road

Rule 2 Only move over when absolutely essential

Rule 3 It is not absolutely essential to move over for British vehicles.

My son has the technique down to a fine art!!

From time time as we shot round corners we could catch glimpses of my wife (his mother) swooping serenely downwards.



We beat her to the landing ground by a short head. The last couple of minutes of the flight were quite active as the instructor jockeyed for position on the landing ground but finally, after more than 20 minutes in the air Diana had solid ground beneath her feet again.

She was cold, and the final approach had proved a bit troublesome so she was a bit unsteady - but she had done it.



Was I impressed? You bet I was!! To accept in the first place was amazing - but to go back after the first abortive attempt and do it again - that shows resolve and determination. I wonder if I would have done it