

NIVIUK PEAK 4

Pat Dower finds the Peak 4 a perfect first competition glider for those wanting to move up to two-liners



▲ HIGH PERFORMANCE

"The legacy of the Icepeak 6 runs through its veins," say Niviuk - and we agree. The Peak 4 blends much of the performance of CCC wings into a much more accessible package: overall, it is a much better wing than the Peak 3, which we found to be slightly flawed in its climb performance in weak conditions
Photo: Niviuk

► SWEET SPOT

Seventy cells and an aspect ratio of 6.8 give it a high-end look. The glider is a window into the world of CCC two-liners, yet gives you the headspace to keep thinking tactically throughout your flight
Photo: Franz Sailer

Niviuk's distinctive Peak family of gliders is now in its fourth generation. All have been EN D but all have also been remarkably different designs, from the classic three-line Peak 2 to the hybrid Peak 3.

To some, the Peak 3's handling felt a little soft and vague. In the flatlands it only really floated if you loaded it lightly and although it had a good turn of speed, it was at the expense of glide angle.

But where the Peak 3 excelled was its collapse resistance. And while accepting that there is no such thing as bombproof, it did a pretty good approximation, and for many it made for a steady transition into the two-line class. Could the Peak 4 improve on the weaknesses whilst retaining the highlights?

First flight surprise

I set up on the pimple next to the main face of a northern UK hill, hoping for a bit of playing on

the ground before setting off to try and soar up the hill.

The launch is typical Niviuk at this level of glider - like the Icepeak 6 it's a little sticky, and using the centre A-line on each side seems a good technique. In strong winds, the timing of when you let go of the As seems quite critical. Too soon - ie before the glider is 75% up - it would drop to the ground again. Once past that point the glider bites and shoots a bit and will over-fly if the pilot is clumsy.

The technique is to use gentle pressure and guide it up, let go at the right moment and apply a small stab of brake. Like with all two-liners, cobra launches using one A-riser and either a B or a brake tend to turn the wing into a writhing snake. The classic approach works well, though.

Once a good firm wall is built the glider behaves much better and using the B-risers





▲DETAILS

“Look ma, no lines!” The simple riser set-up, including rear-riser loops

Most cells are reinforced by nitinol rods, which help form the leading edge and the front third of the chord

Photos: Franz Sailer

keeps it nicely pinned down. It's not CCC-level awkward, but a bit more care and technique is needed than the typical, sorted C glider.

Back to the first flight surprise... I took off from the pimple, easily gained height, then threw in a bit of weightshift to start the 90-degree turn to connect with the main ridge. I almost completed the turn before I'd even started to pull the brake down. This glider is very responsive to weightshift roll! Way more so than any other XC glider I've recently flown – including the Omega X-Alps, Boomerang 10, Mantra M6, Icepeak 7, Cayenne 5 and the Carrera+. As I flew around I even thought about tightening my chest strap. I didn't bother though; I got used to the roll, and rather than feeling unnerved, I started to enjoy it.

In the first part of the travel the brakes feel slightly soft, a bit like the Peak 3, but then firm up reasonably quickly and overall the Peak 4 feels much more precise than its predecessor. Wingovers are easy and build up quickly. A 360 can be turned into a spiral with minimal effort – it almost feels like an acro glider.

The combination of weightshift sensitivity and the direct feel to the brakes (once you have taken the slack out) makes the Peak 4 a very agile glider. Basically, it turns like an impala trying to escape a cheetah! Malin Lobb has flown the Peak 4 at the same respective wing loading on both the 21 and 23, and reports that this roll responsiveness is enjoyed across the weight ranges – a characteristic that was also confirmed to me by designer Oliver Neff.

Thermalling

My first decent thermal day promised light winds and a good lapse rate. The triangle we planned didn't come to pass, despite a decent group trying it. At least my out-landing allowed me to get back to launch with some life left in the day.

Launching late in the day the sky was overdeveloping so thoughts of trying to follow the pre-planned route were abandoned. Just follow the best bits of sky wherever they might lead, I thought. The plan took me over flatlands and gently rolling terrain and I ended up 50km or so away with an Icepeak 8 pilot, landing after 6pm.

The flight allowed interesting comparisons, even though I was on the smallest Peak 4 and the Icepeak 8 was the largest size. For sure, the IP8 had the edge in weak climbs and a slightly better glide but it wasn't enough to leave me feeling frustrated in any way. I felt that with the Peak 4 I could live with some very good company. This much and more was proved at the Colombia Paragliding Open this January, when Stefan Vyparina smoked many of the CCC field to come second on his Peak 4.

Earlier that day I had thermalled with lots of others and was really pleased with the Peak 4's climb performance, even though I was at the top of the weight range. It held its own against just about everything in moderate climbs and in a few tight bullets was superb. It went up like a cork when other gliders were struggling to stay in the narrow cores. One pilot asked if I found the spin point, such was the quick turn into narrow columns of lift – no I hadn't. On a subsequent flight I abused the inside brake a lot more and still didn't spin the glider.

In some respects the Peak 4 reminded me quite a lot of my old Icepeak 6 because of the way it uses its precision and agility to climb really well once there's defined lift of at least 1m/s. It's a bit different to the M6 style of nibbling up in the really weak stuff. It's also rather different to the Omega X-Alps. It feels much more instant and urgent in the turn for a given amount of brake and effort.

What it didn't do quite as well as the Omega X-Alps is climb as the turn is initiated into lift. Comparing to the Peak 3, the Peak 4 shows its Icepeak 6 DNA much more strongly with the precision and more direct feel of its higher-level relative.

Once used to the feedback in roll, pilots on the Peak 4 won't find the workload high. It does flex a bit but not much of that is transmitted to the pilot. For a 6.8 aspect ratio glider it feels cohesive and behaves as a single block.

The level of communication about the air worked well for me. I experienced good strong pulls and a bit of pitch towards lift. When the glider is hit by bumps there is a taut springy feel as opposed to the slightly softer feel of the Omega X-Alps. A Peak 4 pilot won't feel particularly taxed.

Another XC on the Peak 4 with some quite peppy climbs and some strange jolts from

the air was slightly unsettling. It's not fair to blame the glider though – the occasional lenticular was betraying the wave influence on the day. Again I had no collapses and although the Peak 4 did feel a little bit busy it was something I got used to and didn't feel the stress levels rising.

Gliding pleasure

I did lots of gliding on 50-75% bar, controlling all the time with the B-risers. The Peak 4 thrives on being flown like this. It's not hard work either – the speedbar is light. Pilots used to two-liners will only lose a tiny bit of feeling, authority and efficiency flying the 2.5-line Peak 4 in the same way. It definitely feels better than a typical three-liner.

What you are getting in theory is better post-collapse behaviour with the 2.5-line design of the Peak 4 as opposed to the two-line Icepeak 6 or 7. Not that I got a chance to confirm it as I suffered no collapses in about 12 hours of flying in a decent range of conditions. The warnings come from a springy feeling as the nitinol flexes and the lines partially unload.

Active flying on the Bs was only moderately physical but the authority is good. I didn't find

▼ IN THE WILD

The combination of weightshift sensitivity and the direct feel to the brakes makes the Peak 4 a very agile glider, with fantastically fast roll response. "It turns like an impala trying to escape a cheetah", writes Pat Dower

Photo: Niviuk



the limit of control. It seems to have inherited a lot of the solidity of the Peak 3. Of the gliders I have flown, the Peak 4 is the best current EN D for B-line control and this allows you to exploit its glide at speed.

You have plenty of options for increasing your sink rate. Big ears using the baby-As work fine – there's not much flapping either on or off the speedbar. Using the Niviuk-recommended B3 technique, I found the descent faster and more stable. Spiral dives are effective and less demanding than a CCC wing.

Every Niviuk wing I see is just that little bit better finished than the last. This continues the trend. Most cells are reinforced by nitinol rods which help form the leading edge and the front third of the chord, with a separate section in the rear half of the glider. I am told that the nitinol is extremely resilient to bending stress during packing so no paranoia required.

All the reinforcement helps the glider work well as a 2.5-liner which keeps the line consumption to an impressively low 182m for the 21 size. Brakes are old-style poppers, which will make some pilots very happy indeed!

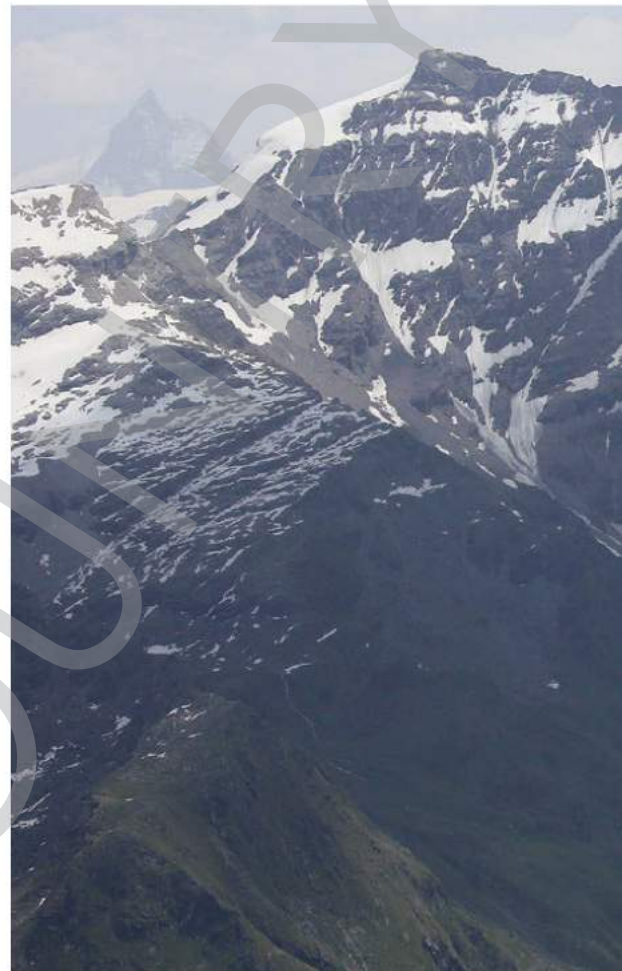
Loading

For my final goodbye flight on a windy, rapidly changing day, I flew the glider a bit lighter at 85kg all-up.

The feeling in the UK from quite a few pilots is that the Peak 4 doesn't need to be flown heavy, but on the 21 I'm not sure I totally agree. There might be differences between sizes of course. I mainly flew at the top of the weight range (90 kg) and wasn't really expecting to find any difference, but actually I did. For the marginal benefit in sink rate, the brakes were vaguer, the glider was buffeted more and the tips felt softer.

Different or not quite as good? Probably the latter. From what we can learn from wing-loading calculations, the 21 loaded at 90kg is equivalent to the 23 loaded at about 99kg (6kg below the top). Or to put it another way: loading the 21 at 85kg is equivalent to the 23 loaded at 93kg. Draw your own conclusions. Speaking to one pilot who has flown a 21 and 23, he found no difference in handling, just significantly lighter pressure on the B-risers on the 23.

Looking at the EN tests for the Peak 4 doesn't reveal much and comparing to the Icepeak 7 there isn't a lot to choose between the two. The one real distinguishing factor is the comment for the Icepeak 7: "This glider meets the minimum required for EN D." No such comment exists for



the Peak 4 and I assume the 2.5-line configuration should give a better recovery from collapses.

The sweet spot

Many pilots are searching for that elusive sweet-spot somewhere between a typical three-liner and a competition two-line CCC glider. There is no doubt that CCC gliders demand a lot of attention, a lot of the time. There are penalties in launch behaviour and of course there is unpredictability of the collapse recovery in real life; the lines are highly optimised and given the sensitivity to trim the pilot should expect to be checking the relative line lengths several times a season, depending on the use.

But who wouldn't want that ability to climb when there seems to be barely any lift; that incredible gliding ability with pure B-riser pitch control to allow you to keep the speed up? The Peak 4 avoids lots of the disadvantages of CCC wings and is a great way of stepping up towards their heights – though in the right hands, as proved, it's not far off in performance.

Although the lines look like they will need checking fairly regularly, it is certainly a lot

Manufacturer's specifications

What Niviuk say: "A pure breed XC wing ... Fly hundreds of kilometres, stable at any speed, designed for long routes"

Use: XC flying

Pilot level: Advanced pilots

Sizes: 21, 23, 25, 27

Take-off weight (kg): 70-90, 85-105, 95-115, 105-125

Cells: 75

Aspect ratio: 6.8

Weight (kg): 5.1-5.8

Certification: EN D

niviuk.com



easier to live with. For most pilots that will be enough.

Final word

Getting back onto the Omega X-Alps served as another useful yardstick and emphasised certain Peak 4 features: light direct brakes, very good B-riser control, and very active in roll. The Peak 4 is good in the flatlands but even better in the mountains with

its tight turning, cohesive feel, solidity and cruising with confidence along ridges with lots of bar.

I stop short of saying it's the perfect glider. But reflecting at leisure, the way I was left feeling was if I didn't already have the Omega X-Alps as my main glider I wouldn't need a lot of persuading to place an order for the Peak 4. ✎

Pat flew the Peak 4 for 12 hours in XC conditions

▲ GLIDEABILITY

"Who wouldn't want the ability to float on and on when there seems to be barely any lift? That incredible gliding ability with pure B-riser pitch control allows you to keep the speed up, making for overall efficiency." Photo: Niviuk

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