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Since we last reviewed an Axis Para wing they have gone from being a new company to a more widely considered and flown paragliding manufacturer. And to success in high level competition, largely due to the Mercury in its various guises. Good XC and Serial comp results on the Vega II have also brought closer attention to their product range.

Since launching in the UK Axis have brought out two incarnations of their comp wing and added the Venus II, Pluto II and Compact II to their range. The MD is Radek Simonik and the chief designer is Frantisek Pavlousek (PWC pilot and Czech team member respectively), with test pilots Michal Snieberg and Martin Orlik. Axis Para is based in Brno in the Czech Republic, and Nicky Moss is part of the British importer, Axis UK, with Mark "Wagga" Watts as a business partner.

The current range includes the Compact II (EN A), Pluto II (on course for EN B), Vega II (EN C), Venus II (on course for EN D) and Mercury 09 (Competition). The Venus II is available in five sizes, with the S, M and L getting their full EN certificates published in late March. There is no plan to certify the XL at present. The five sizes cover 60 to 145kg all-up weight. The size flown for the test was the M (85 - 110kg) size, flown at 106kg all-up. As with most gliders in this class, aspect ratio is quite high at 6.3:1. Both upper and lower surfaces are 40gm Porcher Sport cloth. Lines are Liros Dyneema, with a mixture of sheathed and unsheathed depending on location in the cascades. The upper and middle cascades are unsheathed and the lowers are sheathed.

The glider is supplied with a rucksack, inner bag, riser bag, Velcro compression strap, manual and a T-shirt. The rucksack has improved a lot since the first examples supplied with the Vega II, with better materials and finish, and will easily take a sports harness. Sensibly placed compression straps ensure a good, close fit and carrying comfort is improved. When you unpack the glider for the first time there's an impression of generally high finish and neatness everywhere. Risers are 17mm

polyester, and have a slightly unusual layout in that the maillons on the ends of the risers are not all the same length when the glider is at trim. The outer A comes off a maillon that is between the main A and B risers, and the single D line also comes off a maillon that is some 13cm shorter than the A and B risers. Mylar inserts are carefully crafted so that there isn't a lot of weight hanging about in the leading edge.

The glider inflates very easily so that it will have to be almost flat calm before there's a need for an alpine launch. In light or moderate winds it's a very easy pull-up, followed by a small amount of brake to damp the glider overhead. In strong winds the glider wants to fly all the time. You have to keep it on the ground and either use the Cs to stop it over head or move to it as you pull up. In strong winds the inner As need only be lifted and do not need to be pulled. The glider is one of the best I've ever flown at cobra launches or asymmetric inflations and can be brought overhead without the need to step under the glider, although this helps the process. In general the glider is exceptionally well behaved on the ground - you'd never think it had a flat aspect ratio of 6.3:1.

When laying out a little more care is needed as the middle cascades with the unsheathed lines can touch the ground. They are slightly more prone to tangles within themselves and getting snagged, but when you are flying and benefiting from the superb glide you know that these ultra thin, strong lines play a big part in that. The stabilo line is a very different colour from the rest and works very well to get the tip out of the lines if the wind blows unexpectedly from the side or back. If choosing a colour for this glider I would avoid the white as it will be much easier to see the white Dyneema lines

against a darker background when looking for knots or tangles. The mostly white colour scheme tends to show dirt easily, but other Axis gliders with the mostly non-white colour schemes don't suffer this. White is however the preferred choice for sponsorship logos. If you are detaching the wing from the harness use the riser bag, otherwise the thinnest lines can get caught under the magnetic popper stud on the risers.

In the air the glider responds very quickly to brake inputs, and does excellent carving turns even without weight shift. It's equally at home in very weak lift, turning as flat and efficiently as possible, feeling for lift through brakes and harness, making the most of thermals that some gliders don't seem



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Specification

Model	XS	S	M	L	XL
No of cells	77	77	77	77	77
Span (projected, m)	9.28	9.69	10.09	10.49	11.10
Area (flat, m ²)	21.24	23.12	25.09	27.14	30.95
Aspect ratio	6.30	6.30	6.30	6.30	6.30
Max. chord (m)	2.31	2.40	2.50	2.60	2.75
Line diameter (mm)	0.6/0.85/1.4/1/42				
Glider weight (kg)	5.9	6.4	6.9	7.5	8.4
All-up weight range (kg)	60 - 80	70 - 95	85 - 110	100 - 125	115 - 145
Certification	None	EN D	EN D	EN D	None
Guarantee	2 years materials and workmanship				
Price	£2,650	£2,650	£2,650	£2,650	£2,650

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to be able to climb in, or being thrown hard into the small cores that you get on high pressure days, with hard edges and turbulence. Thermalling this glider is very easy. It's also very good at scratching in the most tight of spaces on small ridges. Brake pressure is firm, and it's possible to get feedback via both the brakes and the harness. This feedback is informative and allows you to make the most of lift, but is never too talkative. When feedback is strong, so are the conditions.

The glider does need active flying, as you would expect, but inputs required are small and the glider gives you time to make sensible corrections to its course in strong conditions. I had no collapses in four hours of strong thermal flying, in early spring in the south of Spain, so I have to give the glider top marks here. In some bumpy air at the inversion there was the occasional partial unloading of the centre section or one tip or the other, but apart from a minor rustle or two nothing happened. As I became more accustomed to the glider it showed me how well balanced it was and it inspired a lot of confidence. At no point did the feeling of trying to control a glider with a high aspect ratio ever appear. The glider is cohesive and feels very stable overhead.

Axis claim 9.7:1 for best glide at trim. I was rewarded with a big area to search over on smaller sites from any notable height, being able to return to the slopes having flown a long way without being rewarded with lift. I noticed a big difference between

this and several EN C gliders in terms of performance without having much more of a workload in flight. The speed bar pressure was moderate, but it does get a bit harder after the first 4cm or so. It's very effective and the glider picks up speed quite quickly so a smooth, controlled push seems to work best rather than the fabled "stamp on it hard" approach. Coming off it has a very noticeable conversion of speed to height.

Big ears are slightly sticky but come out slowly on their own if left. The outer line used for big ears has quite a bit of tension in it which shows a well inflated tip. A one-riser asymmetric is strongly resisted, and comes out quick if pulled in without much of a turn. Pulling more will give a much bigger reaction and was not provoked! B-line stall is moderately physical but not excessively so. The glider does drop back a fair way and needs to be left to stabilise overhead before release. The reinflation is very spontaneous with a small surge that I saw fit to tap the brakes at the end of; the glider then returned very quickly to normal flight. Spiral dives seem to have a small plateau where the glider makes a moderate descent but low G spiral, and this is very easy to control. Pushing beyond this plateau then takes you into a very steep spiral. I didn't pursue this much further but the glider exited from the spiral in a manner that was very easy to control, with a lot of speed converted to height. The manual warns that very high descent spirals may require positive input to exit. It seems that the way to go with the Venus II is to slowly open up your spiral envelope.

Landing is very straightforward. For a glider with a high trim speed it slows down a long way and the brakes give plenty of warning with an easy-to-find stall point. The stall in this glider is a very long way from where you would usually have the brakes when turning, and the pressure built up allows you to slow down a long way without stalling when close to the ground for easy slope landings.

Having done all the test flying for this review I then read the brief précis on the Axis UK website (<http://www.axispara.co.uk/gliders/venus2.htm>). It's very accurate and sums up the glider perfectly. Excellent sink rate, glide, performance and behaviour, with relatively few Cs and Ds in test reports. If you are confident and flying well on an EN C/LTF 2 glider, the Venus II is a sensible upgrade providing you can stay current. The performance is very accessible. One of the things that attracted me to the Venus II when it was offered to me was the way the Venus I's had passed me on the Truleigh run at Devil's Dyke, and several very pleasant flights on its ancestor the Mercury 07.

I would have been very pleased if I had chosen this glider as an XC machine for the current season. Unfortunately it now has to go back! Looking back on the last three weeks, my memories are of a well-behaved, high-performing glider that is equally at home in very weak or very strong stuff, with very low stress for the level of performance it offers.



**Very well behaved
Performance**
*Agile handling without twitchiness
Easy ground handling*



**The white colour scheme shows dirt
easily - choose one of the others!**



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Importer's comment

Venus II is the new 'chick' on the block in the performance/serial-competition class, the little sister to the competition winning 'Mercury'. With this pedigree we are not surprised that Steve found Venus II to have "excellent sink rate, glide, performance and behaviour." Top performance with good stability is the goal of the Axis designers and test pilots. That the Venus II achieves this and at the same time is "low stress" and fun to fly has set a new benchmark within the EN D class. If you are wanting to move to an EN D wing, do yourself a favour and have a go on one of these. You may well find that like Steve you don't want to give her back!

NICKY MOSS, AXIS UK