

Axis Para is a new company on the paragliding scene. Founded in the Czech Republic it is now on its second range of models and has combined the launch of the new range with a big push into countries outside its initial sphere of operation. The MD is Radek Simonik and the chief designer is Frantisek Pavlousek (PWC pilot and Czech team member respectively). The UK importer is Axis UK, overseen by Nicky Moss with Mark "Wagga" Watts helping out on the practical and demo side.

The current range includes the Compact II (EN A), Pluto (AFNOR Standard), Vega II (EN C), Venus (AFNOR Performance) and Mercury (Competition). The Vega II exists in five sizes covering all-up weights from 65 to 170kg. The size flown for the test was the M (85 - 110kg) at about 104kg all up. The Vega II is EN C in all sizes tested so far except the Small, which is EN B, but the target market is the kind of pilot for whom EN C is suitable, an experienced pilot who is current and looking to fly cross country. EN C is roughly equivalent to the bottom two thirds of DHV2. Two sizes (XS and XL) are at the time of writing not yet certified. The Vega II has been attracting a lot of attention since its release in February this year. This is attested to by the amount of postings on forums about it and the number of people on the South Downs asking how long it would be going to be away when I collected it.

The Vega II is made from Porcher 40gm Skytex in the water-repellent variant; lines are Liros PPSL and pulleys are from Riley Fittings of Australia. Well known materials like these answer the question that people often ask about durability of products from new entrants into the market. The Vega II comes complete with a rucksack, inner bag, Velcro compression strap and a manual.

Initial examination shows very tidy construction with high standards of finish. One or two items are slightly chunky, like the cords used on the speed system, and there is no butt-hole to extract debris from. I've never needed one on my own glider, but have sometimes had to remove glass or other small debris from demo gliders. The bag is spacious and will swallow both the glider and a harness with a 17cm Bump'Air. The shape of the bag is similar to many on the market now: the glider goes into the bag first to provide padding for pilot's back and the harness then fits in upside down. Compression straps fitted to the sides and front of the bag ensure that it will be a good fit for whatever is placed inside. The bag is comfortable to carry and does the job well, although pilots who feel the need for style may not be overly keen on the finish on the compression straps. There is also no pocket in the top flap large enough for a helmet, but the helmet does fit under the top flap. The inner bag provided is generously cut.

Lines are neatly finished. Riser material is 20mm polyester (minimum strength 2,000kg), the thinner type used for some gliders in the "experienced pilot" category. Riser system is a four-way one with split As. Lines are slightly thinner than average, with the outer A riser connected to the B riser and the stabilo on the C riser. The stabilo is a very different colour from all the other lines, a useful detail. The speed system has separate pulleys on the A and B risers, and rather thick cord. Whilst the finish is well done, the thickness of the line does look a little clunky in comparison with the rest of the riser.

I flew the Vega II for the first time on a small site with very limited launching area, close to a barbed-wire fence. I hoped the lighter fabric would give good launch characteristics and I was pleasantly surprised over and above my expectations. The glider will inflate very easily from mushroomed in all but the lightest winds, ready for inspection. The pull-up was easy and even if the glider goes off because you didn't level the leading edge it's not big deal to get it properly overhead. Top marks for ground handling. Alpine launches need a little care. If you are tempted to load the glider suddenly with too much of a run it can come up fast, requiring a big damping input. A sensible accelerating run starting with the lines just taut does the trick nicely.

In the air there is the impression of firm brakes and generally of a solid and well-behaved canopy overhead. The glider is sensibly damped in pitch but not dead overhead, moving back and forth as sinking and lifting air is encountered but requiring only small brake inputs to maintain the correct canopy position. The glider is superb to thermal, banking up to any angle asked without nervousness or hesitation. I found it particularly easy to get quick, steep carving turns from trim with co-ordinated brake and weight shift. In a range of conditions from very weak to moderately strong, I found it had no preference for flat or tight turns, and therefore was at home in either sort of conditions. There is good feedback through the risers, and it's possible to adjust weight shift response by opening or closing the chest strap without being thrown about too much at wider settings. The Vega II is tested at 46 and 42cm for the top and bottom end of the weight range respectively as these weights are either side of the 80kg pilot body weight at which the setting changes. If anything, this glider is a good argument for firm brakes as there is good feedback through them. If a small thermal or core tried to tip the glider out, the slightest of tweaks on brakes or weight shift, of which brakes were better, would immediately result in tightening up.

PHOTO STEVE UZOCHEKWI

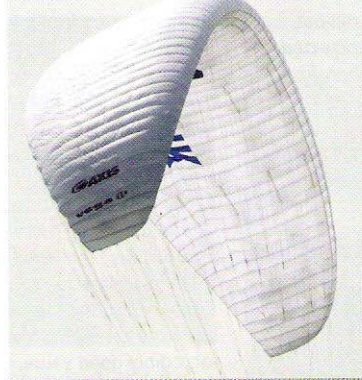


PHOTO AXIS UK



PHOTO STEVE UZOCHEKWI



The B-line stall is classic and very effective, without being too hard to pull or maintain like some other gliders. The descent rate can become very high if you want it to. Stability is good without any thrashing although there is a small amount of movement. Recovery is classic too and without needing anything other than a wary eye on the canopy and a very small dab on the brakes. I have never been so comfortable B-lining a glider as with this one.

Spirals are easy to get into. It's possible to enter one with under 360 degrees of turn. It's easy to control the rate, and the energy retained can be converted to height if you exit gradually over a couple of turns. The glider does exactly as it's told but is not for the heavy-handed or inexperienced as it will wind into whatever level of spiral you ask it to.

Big ears are easy to do as a consequence of the split As, but it looks like the primary reason for the split As is speed-system design. Big ears are sticky and stay in short term, but any change in direction, turbulence or, of course, touching the brakes brings them out. Over a 15-second period they will usually pop out anyway. One-riser collapses, if pulled, come out immediately with almost no turn and a fierce pull at your hand. If held in for any length of time a turn develops quite quickly, reminding you that this is an EN C wing.

Speed system use I found to be slightly stiff initially, but when I changed the cord in my harness for stuff better matched to the pulleys the problem went away. There is a very slight stiffening of the bar about 25% into its travel but it was easy to get it to full stretch with the newer cord. You may notice a very slight vibration in lines and risers at trim, but I only ever found it when very high and very cold at close to 2,500m amsl in the Alps.

Specification

Model	XS	S	M	L	XL
No of cells	65	65	65	65	65
Span (projected, m)	8.96	9.45	9.95	10.55	11.14
Area (flat, m ²)	20.87	23.26	25.77	28.96	32.91
Aspect ratio	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75
Max. chord (m)	2.41	2.55	2.68	2.84	3.02
Line diameter (mm)	1.2/1.4/1.9	1.2/1.4/1.9	1.2/1.4/1.9	1.2/1.4/1.9/1.2/1.4/1.9	1.2/1.4/1.9
All-up weight range (kg)	65 - 85	70 - 95	85 - 110	100 - 130	125 - 170
EN certification		B	C	C	
Guarantee	Two years materials and workmanship				
Price	£ 2,150	£ 2,150	£ 2,150	£ 2,150	£2,200



Wingovers are easy and it is surprising how quickly they will build up. As with thermalling, the impression is of agility but with smoothness.

The Vega II is incredibly easy to fly, but it must not be forgotten that this is an EN C glider, and in the stronger stuff it will need a pilot who knows what they are doing and will not overreact to any incidents. However, after an end-of-summer and early autumn testing period in the UK and a trip to France I'd nothing to report in terms of needing to intervene. One or twice in wave turbulence I heard or saw slight unloading at the tip but did not get any collapses. I was left with the impression of a very well-sorted glider.

In fact my first impressions of the glider almost left me with a feeling of "too good to be true". Bearing in mind that "all reviews are excessively positive" to quote one forum member, I've looked for the areas where this glider can be faulted. You may not like it if you prefer light brakes but on the other hand it might convince you that firm brakes are a good thing. I can only find little things to complain about, like wanting slightly better styling and finish on the bag, and the lack of a butt-hole.

However, these things do not affect how well it flies, and for me a glider is about flying, not posing or looking for peer admiration. The Vega II flies very well, and for this reason it's an excellent product. I'd go so far as to say that if it had a major manufacturer's name on it and the tiny issues above were sorted there would be a stampede to buy it. Already the rumour machine has spread word of this glider and quite a few people wish to try it in my area.

I think we can congratulate Axis Para on a superb product that delivers where it counts, and one that no pilot looking for an EN C/DHV2* level glider can afford to ignore when short-listing gliders to test fly.

Importer's comment

We're pleased Steve had such a good time on the glider and liked it so much. It's praise indeed to hear him say it's "superb to thermal" and that it's "incredibly easy to fly" while also praising its high performance and good stability. We genuinely think the Vega II is indeed a superb glider, and lots of people who have flown it have said similar things to Steve. The minor niggles he mentions are being ironed out over winter, so come spring we think this glider will be the one the UK XC hounds will be flying. Thanks for a great review.

NICKY MOSS, AXIS UK

* EN A is roughly equivalent to DHV1, and EN C DHV2. AFNOR Standard covers a range from DHV1 up to the very top end of DHV1-2, or very low-end DHV2. See Skywings article *Certification and CEN - how does it all work? Part 2: The flying tests*, in November 2006.

Summary



All round flying excellence



Minor details in things like the bag or lack of a butt-hole