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# Cross Country

# 181



**'SHEER JOY OVERWHELMS THE SENSES'**

Scott Mason remembers the good times as the curtain falls on Parahawking in Nepal

# THE NAKED PILOT

## STEFAN KELLER

**I've been flying 14 years.** I live in the middle of Switzerland on the south side of the Jura mountains.

**My first long cross-country flight** was in the high mountains of Switzerland. I flew from near Zurich to Austria, about 180km in 2002.

**I am an instructor** and have had a paragliding school for more than a decade. I started flying when I was 40 and I am now 54.

**Four years ago I had a paragliding accident.** It took me 11 months to get back in the air but when I did it was like coming home. I flew for an hour, alongside my friend Chrigel Maurer who was flying tandem with a photographer. Both the physical and mental challenge of flying was easy. I just came back to it.

**One of my favourite places** to fly is the Isle of Wight in England. Dave Botha runs Butterfly Paragliding there and is one of my best friends. I go every year and take a group of eight or nine other pilots. This year I have a student coming who is also a wheelchair user. He is learning to fly.

**In the air it is no different.** It's like flying with a normal harness. In the harness I forget I am in a wheelchair. The wheelchair is a normal wheelchair but a little bit special. It's like having a custom racebike. After landing I have my normal wheelchair with me and this is the important thing. I land and am immediately mobile.

**Launch is a gravity take-off.** Gravity works, no one has to push. Most people think they have to push, but pushing is a mistake. Do you like it on launch if someone pushes you? No! Wheelchair users don't like it either. Gravity pulls the wheelchair down, and that gives the speed.

**Zero wind or even a light wind** from behind is OK. Strong wind from the front

is difficult and dangerous. If it is windy though I can make a cobra launch, and in the wheelchair it is easy.

**I have a project to fly north to south across the Alps** this summer. I plan to fly or roll a straightline distance of 130km. It is my own personal X-Alps. I need four days of good weather in July.

**The idea started as a project for Swiss TV**, but then they decided they didn't want to make it. They said the project was interesting but I was too old! Now I am just doing it for myself. My friend Nathalie is supporter. It's very exciting!

**I fly an Ikuma from Niviuk.** Niviuk have been very good friends to me for more than a decade.

**My favourite places to fly** are the Isle of Wight, the Alps and Colombia. I was in Colombia in January and February for five weeks. The first two weeks on the Caribbean coast, then in the flying sites around Bogota and then one week in Roldanillo.

**I have pain.** And in Colombia, when I go in the winter, I have not so strong pain. Also on the Isle of Wight. When I am happy the pain goes down. Warm is better than cold.

**There are more wheelchair pilots** in France, but I am the only wheelchair instructor in the whole world. The difficult thing for walkers is to think like a wheelchair user.

**I have a lot of wheelchair students now.** I have students in Colombia, and in May I have a student coming to Switzerland from Norway. I am a specialist now in teaching wheelchair users to fly paragliders. They are all new pilots. After take-off, you don't have a disability. ☒

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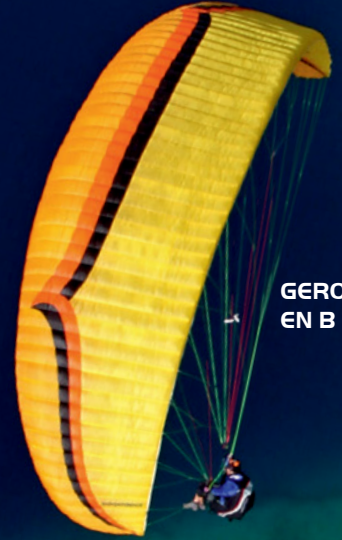


▲ ON A ROLL  
At the Swiss Open in Fiesch, 2015  
Photo: Martin Scheel

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