

First Impressions - Swing Mistral 4

Swings high performance, record breaking DHV 1-2

By Ian Curren

I had my first decent flight on the Swing Mistral 4 yesterday (26 July 06), and was also getting to grips with my new Alti-Rando harness and ventral reserve set up.

The Mistral 4 is Swing's latest evolution of the Mistral series. They have seriously reduced the line useage on the 4 and it is regarded as one of the hottest wings in its class. Indeed, knowing that for the first time 300km had been achieved on a DHV 1-2 wing and the Mistral being the one, I was looking forward to a shot on it myself.

It was a bit of a snap decision going out as we were working in the Northern office till 1.30pm but it looked great out of the window, hot and sunny with a few very weak cumulus and a light westerly breeze, so we downed mice and set off walking up Dalefoot (the SW site is immediately behind the shop). I just had time to weigh my kit – 12.4kg for the lot, just before I started out. This put me at 98Kg on the medium M4.

Neil Cruickshank and Pete Morris were ahead of me and stopped at 100ft up to try for a fly up, I decide to walk another 100ft or so to give myself a better chance. Neil was on the Windtech Kali and Pete on the U-turn Free Force. A couple of other pilots were there too Graham Laycock on an Infinity 2 and two visitors from France.

I was on a slope in maybe 7mph of wind, so I just nudged the front risers up to launch. That did not work, the wing sat down again, and I had to give a reasonable tug to get it up. This bodes well for launching in stronger stuff I think. From my higher point, the fly up was dead easy, and I spent much of it fiddling with my ventral reserve to get it to sit just right. How was the glider? Hard to say! It did not register with me at all; it just flew where I wanted.

The Mistral 4 looks great. Swing have done a superb job on the colour scheme and the orange/black combo works particularly well. The wing looks very well made with neat risers and the usual complex swing speed system (one of the truly excellent points on the Mistral's little sister, the Arcus 4).

Neil and Pete had caught up to me now and we all cruised around above the top, I found a small core that was lifting maybe 60% of the way round and started to circle, I noticed that the Mistral had a tendency to level up a bit as the lift died, - usually on the downwind leg, but as I climbed and the thermal grew a bit, it stopped trying to fly out and I could hold a good co-ordinated turn, albeit with a good helping of weight shift. The handles were a bit narrow and I kept shifting from flying with 3 fingers in them to 4 fingers then back again, and the brake travel was quite long too as seems to be the trend, so I had to suppress the urge to take a wrap at times. The thermal was still going strong at 900ft ATO, but I was drifting downwind towards Tailbridge hill, and I wanted to glide cross wind to try and get onto the huge 6km Mallerstang ridge that runs from Dalefoot down towards Hawes, so I pulled out and set off cross wind with what felt like plenty of height.

No sign of Neil or Pete at this stage, both are far more accomplished pilots than me but on this occasion I had left them behind on the ridge. 10 minutes later I am approaching the foot of the soarable face of Mallerstang having cunningly underestimated the height I needed to make the glide by about 50m. I am still well above the valley floor but find myself scratching along a very shallow slope that forms a kind of plateau half way up the main ridge. This was hair raising stuff, I was gliding a few hundred metres maintaining height then turning into wind just before landing to fly forward and try and stay airborne. The terrain was gulleys, big rocks and grassy patches. My mouth was dry, but I could see that a kilometre further on the upper and lower slopes merged into one and it looked a good bet I could scratch back up from there.

At that point I sank the last few metres and found myself jogging with the inflated wing! We ran downhill cross-wind uphill crosswind, over rocks, through a boggy bit and the Mistral never even wavered. And a minute or two later I was off again and soaring along a 4m high ridge (old mine workings I think) and reaching heights of maybe 30ft at times! I started to relax again and sat back, when the vario suddenly shrieked at me and a big hand yanked me upwards. It seemed too good to be true, and it was. 50% of my wing collapsed and I lost most of the height again, though I must say the Mistral was dead easy to hold straight and hardly pitched at all, despite the severe provocation.

5 minutes (and another short jog) later I am in the main ridge lift again and powering skywards, I look back towards Dalefoot and the school gliders far below and notice it looks a bit black and showery beyond them, - I am aware that that

is the way back and thunderstorms are forecast for this afternoon. I am well up above the ridge now and maybe 1,800ft above the valley floor, and the wind seems to be picking up, I am struggling to penetrate much and decide to head out into the valley rather than get to the far end of the ridge and risk being trapped there by strong winds and thunderstorms. It is sink city out here, so I soon decide to head for home and I have chance to play around with the wing on the way.

The main impression it is that it is very pitch stable, and although the turns need quite a bit of weight shift to bite, once you are dialled into it the Mistral is a very comfortable and responsive wing. After about an hour I am coming into land near the students I find that the whole valley floor is lifty and I hold big ears for quite a while as I weight shift turn into the field.

It was hard to compare performance on a day like this, but I would say the M4 is a very accomplished bit of kit and has to be a strong contender for the second time buyer. I will certainly be sticking with it for a while as I am not a happy bunny in rough air and the Mistral is a very reassuring ride for pilots at my level, and I did enjoy looking down on everyone!!

It did not storm on us, but it did stay very hot and humid, and we all finished the day swimming in the deep pool in the river just a few hundred metres from the shop.

FOR:- Pitch stable, reassuring, excellent performance

AGAINST:- Longish brake travel.