



## ON LAUNCH WITH **VIOLETA JIMENEZ**

**I started paragliding in 2014.** I was living in Atlanta, Georgia, and had some friends who flew. People told me you could pack it in a backpack. As an ultrarunner, this intrigued me!

**I moved to Seattle, Washington,** because I wanted to be a little closer to the mountains, and since my family lived there, it was an easy choice to move.

**I work as an AI innovation director.** My background is in public health, specifically epidemiology, which has been interesting the last few years with the Covid pandemic.

**My job has enabled me to pursue my flying goals.** I've been travelling and competing a lot – I think I did 12 competitions in the last year, a lot of which were outside the USA.

**I'm an ambitious and competitive person.** I love knowing what it's like to do something well. When I started chasing competitions I could see a big gap between myself and the people who were doing well. It showed me how much there was to learn!

**My flying style has evolved a lot.** When I started flying comps, I was on a small competition wing. Over the past year I've transitioned to a small-medium-sized D wing and then to a small Enzo. The transitions have changed the way I fly. When you're on a more evenly matched wing, you can be more strategic in how you fly a competition. You can work on discipline and control and make moves on your own that might pay off because you know you can come back to the group.

**I admire discipline and consistency because it's the smart way to fly.** I am trying to develop a style that takes advantage of being disciplined and flying well with the group but also being able to identify



◀ **READY TO FLY**

Violeta Jimenez on launch in Castelo, Brazil, in March  
Photos: Pete Thompson

the opportunities to be a little bit more aggressive and push ahead.

**My biggest personal challenge** is in fear management and trusting myself, mainly due to an accident I had a couple of years ago. Since then, I've done a lot of work to try to separate the rational from the irrational moments of fear. I have to be able to make the call, "Am I freaked out about this situation because it reminds me of my accidents, but it's not actually dangerous? Or am I freaked out because my subconscious has collected enough information to know this is not okay?"

**On the day I got hurt had I been alone, I would have landed.** We were flying into a venturi and my brain was telling me things felt different. But I didn't listen to myself. Coming back from that and finding the balance between trusting myself but also being able to silence the lizard brain, where irrational fear lives, is my biggest challenge.

**As part of my recovery I knew I wanted to fly again,** even if it was to close this chapter of my life. I knew I didn't want my last memory of flying, which I loved so much, to be crashing and trauma. And, of course, when I got back in the air, I didn't want to close the book at all. Once I launched, it was a big exhale – it felt terrific and really natural.

**Returning to flying I got some grief from people.** Many people's reactions stem from unchecked biases around how people treat men versus women. "You need to slow down, you need to be less aggressive," they would say. But when my guy friends get injured, it's, "Trust yourself, you can get back at it."

**It makes it more difficult as a woman** who wants to achieve things if you're being told not to trust yourself. There are some

obvious disadvantages to being a woman in competitive paragliding. In general, we tend to be smaller and lighter; as such, I have to carry a lot more weight relative to my body size.

**The real challenge is more psychological.** It's about how people treat you, how you've been taught to think about yourself. I think some people would be surprised by how deep that goes. In the Super Final, for example, I was having some weird issues with my new Enzo, and this guy started coaching me on how to fly with my B's and how I needed to learn better control, even though I'd been flying an Enzo for hundreds of hours. I switched back to my old Enzo, and it flew great. But I had all this crap in my brain for a day and a half.

**I'm a confident person, but that still gets in your head.** I spent the day like, wow, maybe I'm *not* paying attention, and perhaps I *do* need to learn to control my wing better. And then I switched back to my old Enzo, and I was like, no, it's the wing. It's not me.

**Other than women being smaller,** there's no difference between women and men in this sport, except probably social conditioning. And it should be clear that women can accomplish the same things in this sport as men!

**It's not just about competitions.** It can be easy to burn out if all you do is fly comps. Washington and the northern Cascades are beautiful in the summer, and I'm looking forward to flying here without the competition factor. 🇺🇸  
*Interview by Liz Dengler*

*Violeta Jimenez won the women's class at the British Winter Open in Castelo, Brazil in March. Results are at [airtribune.com/bwo2023/results](http://airtribune.com/bwo2023/results)*

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