



PILOT SPOTLIGHT: RYAN GLOWKA

BY LIZ DENGLER



“I first learned about paramotoring from YouTube”



I'm originally from the Austin area of Texas but am now based in Crystal Beach, Texas. It's a small, sleepy town on the coast just a little ways outside of Houston.

I started flying paramotors eight years ago from Zack Pennell when I was 17. After I was signed off, I just kept hanging out in the fields and flying; he couldn't make me go away. So, instead, he eventually just started having me help out around the shop and helping to teach, and I realized I loved it. Ultimately, I went to Chad Bastion to get certified so I could teach my own students.

I first learned about paramotoring from YouTube when I was 14. I told my parents I wanted to do it, and they were fine with it as long as I got the money myself. As every pilot knows, getting into the sport is at least ten grand, so I has some work to do. I started off selling sodas at school, and it wasn't long after that that I joined the local Renaissance Festival on the weekends. I lived next to a festival and got a gig on the weekends. I was making decent money doing it, so I dropped out of school when I was 15 and started traveling from festival to festival with my fireworks stand and selling Turkish coffee, Baklava, and foam swords.

When I was 17, I had enough money to sell all the businesses and got into paramotoring after purchasing some shotty equipment. I certainly had quite a few engine outs in the beginning—It seemed like pretty much every flight

I'd be asking my dad to pick me up from some farmer's field.

When I learned to motor, I treated it like college and studied up as much as I could. That was especially true when I did my instructor and tandem clinics; I was fully invested. I showed up with my entire notebook, taking notes like a college student.

I mostly foot-launch here in Texas at the beach, but I love flying trikes when the opportunity arises. I help with Santacroce's Project Airtime quite a bit and love taking folks out to fly in the trike.

Right now, my life is centered around paramotoring and setting up our flight park, Paramotor Paradise, in Crystal Beach, Texas. My partner Paul Short and I bought 23 acres of land on the coast to turn into a flight park, and it's only about an hour outside of Houston. The property is on a peninsula, so we have both beach and bay breezes and can typically fly all day. We've leveled out the ground, ensured good drainage, and have a nice shop and showroom on the property. Currently, we're developing a smooth grassy launching/landing field and adding another showroom and classroom where everyone can hang out and an RV park where pilots can stay.

We've also subdivided 20 lots to sell to paramotor pilots who want to set up an RV or tiny house at the flight park. The goal is to have a place where everyone congregates, flies together, and hangs out in the evening; we want to help build that community for

paramotor pilots. Plus, who doesn't want to lay their wing out and take off from the front door?

Paramotor Paradise Flight Park is, of course, where my flight school, Texas Paramotor, is based. I've been teaching through the school for about five years and certify all of our students through the USPPA. Our goal is to put out as good of students as we can. We teach in a 10-day course format here on the beach, and we can train and fly eight to ten hours per day using multiple kinds of equipment. We offer beginner PPG courses up to advanced, pylon training, and acro training maneuvers courses (though we go to Turkey for that). My goal is to help pilots progress safely and consciously and help build the community we love.

As much as I love paramotoring, my favorite flights have actually been free flight acro runs off the launch in Turkey. From launch over the ocean, it's 6,000 feet, so there is plenty of space to practice your skills and develop new ones. Besides the views of the mountains along the sea, it's one of the safer environments to work on this stuff because the air is generally mellow, you're over water, and there

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are safety boats out all the time in case of a mishap. You can go out there with your crew and train acrobatics all day, as many rounds as you want!

My favorite paramotoring flight of all time is my everyday flight. The flight where you wake up and 20 of your friends roll up; everyone is getting their motors warmed up and talking about how awesome this flight is going to be, where they're going to go, and what they're working on today. That's my favorite flight because we get to relive it every day with all of the community we help to build.

Some long-term goals are to motor in Southeast Asia, all throughout Thailand and Vietnam. I also want to break the world distance record for a paramotor flight. That one is going to take a lot of work because I have to carry about 20 to 25 gallons of fuel, and we need to get FAA approval for that. That, or we'll have to try it out

of the country, but it would be much more convenient to do it from Texas into Oklahoma.

I've had some close calls in my career but have fortunately managed to keep my nose pretty clean through intermediate syndrome. I always try to remember that I could still be in that stage and that no one is ever really exempt from it. I think it helps me rein it in when I need to.

My first "in the wild" reserve toss was early in my acro paragliding career. I had watched YouTube videos and figured I pull off an infinite tumble. Needless to say, I ended up diving into my lines. It was humbling, and I learned a lot from that. Knowledge and progression are essential, and skipping those steps when I was younger led to that event. I try to look back and learn from that experience, and apply it with the new tricks I am learning. These days, I am always seeking far and wide for educated advice.





If I could change one thing about the sport, it would be to improve the safety mindset of pilots everywhere. I learned a lot from Chris Santacrosce and have tried by best to adopt that same safety mindset-it's the mentality I try to instill in my friends and my students. I want to make sure that everyone is working on their skills and doing them properly, such as flying with a reserve and wearing water floatation when appropriate.