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THE FUTURE IS HERE

Richard Sheppard on a lifetime hooked on flying free



NIVIUK ARTIK 4

Pat Dower flies Niviuk's new sports wingand finds the Spanish brand back on track

I was a big fan of the Artik 3. In fact I liked it so much that I bought an Icepeak 6. That might sound like an insult but it's not; I felt the Artik 3 was the glider where everything came together for Niviuk. Smooth responsive handling; great for coring; good glide at speed; nice level of feedback. The 3 was just a sweet and balanced high performing sports glider. My reasoning held good and the IP6 was a beauty: an Artik 3 with the wick turned up.

It hasn't been all good for Niviuk recently though. The Peak 3 (low EN D) had a mixed reception and although it was loved for its amazing collapse resistance and generally good behaviour the performance disappointed many pilots. The Icepeak 7 Pro, in the white heat of top-level competition where small margins count, just couldn't match the Enzo 2 in many pilots' eyes. Although it was stable and many liked the handling it wasn't long before low hours IP7 Pro Models were appearing in the classified ads.

For the Artik 4, Niviuk claim: "With its superb gliding even when fully accelerated, efficiency could be compared to an EN D glider but with the handling ability of an EN C wing." I was interested to see if they'd met the brief.

Construction

I had a few days looking at the glider before the weather played ball. The risers are ridiculously

similar to those on the Icepeak 7 Pro and scream top-end performance. The Artik 4 only has one additional lower line per side compared to the 2014 race machine. The aspect ratio has crept up from the previous Artik from 5.9 to 6.1. So is it hot? Looking further I was surprised that there was only plastic in the leading edge and none of the reinforcements around the B and C attachments. What's this? It's a 3.5 liner! Eleven extra branches per side from the C lines creating a partial row of D lines.

Discussing this with Niviuk's head of design, Olivier Nef, revealed that Niviuk deliberately avoided using plastic in the rear of the Artik 4 as it can create wear points when the glider is used on rough launch terrain. The partial row of D's provides the additional support needed. Although Olivier didn't go into details I suspect that the extra challenge of the new EN tests was eased by the presence of some D-lines. Most impressively the total line length is actually over 6% lower than the Artik 3. There are some very fine lines on the Artik 4, just as there are in other gliders in the sports class. I asked Olivier how well we could expect the glider to stay in trim. He explained that the load distribution across the lines is much more even than on some other gliders, especially two-liners, so much less variation in trim can be expected as the glider ages. In terms of strength the lines are well up to the job when new, but as

◀ SUNLIT UPLANDS

Barney Woodhead enjoys autumn air on the new Artik 4. The glider is a 3.5-liner. Photo: Phil Colbert

▼ DETAILS

Aspect ratio is 6.1 – up from 5.9 on the Artik 3. Photo: Niviuk

Set-back A-lines and a 6% lower line length compared to the Artik 3. Photo: Phil Colbert





with any modern sports glider it is well worth having the strength tested at service time.

So with no clear indication about the character of the glider from looking at it, handling and flying was going to be interesting!

First flights

The glider inflates beautifully and is really forgiving, even in strong winds. It climbs into the air more steadily than the Delta 2 and Mentor 3 for example and no special technique is needed to stop it overflying. Using both the split-As to guide it up or one A-line on each side is equally easy; I really felt I had the glider on my side. For the windiest inflations of all, a small jab of brake to slow the last part of the rise means it settles overhead with no additional damping needed. For comparison I tried a cobra with the glider starting at 90-degrees to the wind. If anything it is even easier. Although this isn't my favoured technique (due the dragging of the lower half of the wing across the ground), it is very forgiving.

In the climb

Late season UK, where I did my flying for the review, threw up the expected mixed bag of conditions. The first flight was in broken, wave

influenced air. I felt mild bumps through the harness and a little bit of feedback through the brakes as the pressure in the glider changed. The pitch was very stable and I had no hints of collapse with the normal level of active flying. So far the Artik was feeling very accessible.

My first thermal flying came on my second day – with a best rate of 2m/s it was hardly ripping. Some EN B gliders flown by good pilots had found some lift and I came in underneath them. The weak thermal needed re-centring to find the best bits on the upwind side. The Artik 4 told me exactly where to be. It was a touchy-feely climb, the sort that higher-end gliders excel in. The Artik 4 has a fairly benign feel for its class yet it gave me all the information I needed: little pitches towards lift; gentle pressure increase on one riser set and brake. Now in the best part of the lift, I climbed away from the others. It is not that the Artik 4 has an incredible sink rate, but it does have an efficient turn to match the feedback. Sweet!

On another day with strong wind and sharp-edged thermals the flying was neither relaxing nor pleasant! I want a sports glider to look after me with some margin to spare whilst I can still use the performance on offer. Just after launch a strong wind-torn bullet ripped through and gave me a

▲ ON GLIDE

"Pushing into wind, finding and coring thermals the Artik 4's flat polar curve clearly served it very well."

Photo: Niviuk

30% collapse. The violence of the air at that point made the wing slap in quite hard, but actually the fact that it only went in 30% was reassuring. Weightshift to the flying side meant I actually turned away from the collapse. It opened itself quickly with just a tiny tip cravat which needed a sharp 50% pump to pop it out.

In the less-than-ideal thermals I appreciated the smooth linear turn rate and the solid cohesion of the wing, no doubt helped by the extra lines in the upper gallery. I needed to tighten on the cores to take advantage, but is it the most instantly agile of gliders? Probably not. There is a slightly softer feel to the brakes and the response rate, and its handling is not as direct as that of the Sigma 9. The Artik 4 needs a bit more brake than the Sigma 9 to get it turning, but feels nearly as compact. To be clear though – it turns beautifully and it is definitely no laggard.

Stronger cores give better information – I could feel the brake on the side in the best lift loading up and transmitting the power. It comes more alive in the strong stuff, but it does so without giving the pilot sensation overload. Doing wingovers shows that little bit of extra damping in both pitch and

roll compared to many other sports class gliders such as the top-end Nova Triton 2 and even the EN B Mentor 3. Flying within 5kg of the top of the weight range felt right to me: good sink rate/glide at speed and not sacrificing sharpness in handling.

On glide

The glide on the Artik 4 seems to be right up there. Cruising on the ridge didn't really show up any noticeable performance advantage against a Delta 2 (ML) in close company but when searching away from the ridge, pushing into wind, finding and coring thermals the Artik 4's flat polar curve clearly served it very well. Pilot decisions were part of it, but the Artik 4 was helping me make the right decisions and take advantage of the conditions.

As ever the differences between the gliders was such that it would be a brave man to definitively state which is best. The speed bar is light and comparable to the current crop but as so often is the case, the short-legged pilot could struggle to get full travel unless the top step of the speed system can go back underneath the seat of the harness. I got about 12km/h increase in speed

Hot or not?

Hot: Fully unsheathed lines (except the lowest brake line); 6.1 aspect ratio; racy risers; C-handles; performance in spades; plenty of feel from the air.

Not: 3.5 liner; easy launch; damped in pitch and roll; linear smooth brake response; wing moves as a single block.

▼ ON THE TURN

“There is a slightly softer feel to the brakes but it turns beautifully and is definitely no laggard.

Photo: Phil Colbert





above trim but I was still about 2cm short of touching pulleys.

On a really fun day with 3m/s thermals and cloud lines I was able to explore a few kilometres into a 25km/h wind with a Mantra M6. Using the right amount of bar more often than the other pilot and circling only occasionally, I was able to work away from the M6. Gliding on speedbar through the active air doesn't require gritted teeth and the leading edge looks and feels solid. It shows the great capability of a well-flown Artik 4 against a higher-performing but lazily flown glider. Without feeling amazing in the way that a two-liner does, it just performs really well.

Fast descent

My preferred fast-descent techniques with the Artik 4 are spiral dive or big ears with speed bar. With only two A-lines per side, pulling just one on each side brings in a fair chunk of the wing. The pressure on the line is really high, to the point that it is pretty uncomfortable in summer gloves to crack the leading edge. Holding in the ears thankfully requires much less effort and they were stable with no flapping. On release one tip snapped open sharply and the second ear worked itself out in a few stages. The outer C-line tip stall

is not recommended – it pulls on too much of the rear of the glider. Personally I do not see the point of a B-stall and I did not try it.

In conclusion

The paragliding community is not there yet but there is a creeping recognition of the fact that the EN rating does not tell you everything about the level of the glider. However, I must say that the Artik 4 feels like an EN C sports class glider should. No deceptive low grade in the test; no high-end nervousness. Niviuk have resisted the temptation to make it hot, but have given us very good all-round performance. It sits nicely in the middle of EN C and like the Delta 2 and Sigma 9 is a good choice for a pilot ready to move up from a high EN B. It feels noticeably softer and more forgiving than the three-line EN Ds like the M6 and the D class gliders in C-class clothing like the UP Trango XC2. It's almost hard to pinpoint what makes the Artik 4 such a good glider. It's not a wild stallion nor a seaside donkey. Maybe it's a wolf in a pack that just keeps going, wearing down its prey and coming out on top in the long game. Nice one Niviuk! **✪**

Pat flew the Artik 4 (M) at 92kg all-up with an Advance Impress 2. Testing was in the UK.

▲SORTED GLIDER

"The Artik 4 feels like an EN C sports class glider should. No deceptive low grade in the test; no high-end nervousness.

Photo: Phil Colbert

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



Alongside other cross country gliders from Niviuk it is easy to see the family lineage. The risers are very similar. The Artik 4 has only seven lower lines per side plus the brake, compared to the six-plus-brake for the IP7 Pro. The speed system, the very reliable brake magnets, the pulleys for speed system and brakes, the handles on the rear risers are all very similar.

Both use a shark-type nose, with the A-line attachment point well back from the leading edge. The Artik 4's cell openings are twice the size of the Pro and further forward. It's more of a "baby sharknose" – like the Sigma 9 and Delta 2. One note on the C-handles: the production run will feature slightly higher handles than the pre-production risers pictured.

MANUFACTURER'S INFO

What they say: "The Artik 4 will cover your needs 365 days a year. It is our all around Grand Touring glider."

Sizes (m2): 21, 23, 25, 27, 29

Take-off weight (kg): 50-70, 60-80, 75-95, 90-110, 105-126

Cells: 63

Aspect ratio: 6.1

Weight: 4.3-6kg

Certification: EN C

www.niviuk.com

▼ HANDS UP

"It sits nicely in the middle of EN C and like the Delta 2 and Sigma 9 is a good choice for a pilot ready to move up from a high EN B."

Photo: Niviuk

