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THE SOUL FLYING SLICEMAN

An Interview with Master Class Soul flyer Brian Vanderslice: The Man Behind that Innovative Style.

The first time I saw Brian fly, I was a Novice competitor at the Sandy Hook Stunt Kite Championships in 1991. Watching how he totally connects himself between the kite and the music was remarkable. I could see and feel the intensity of emotion and execution of a statement as he would fly. Although I didn't personally meet Brian until more than a year and half later, he is a soul flyer that extends beyond the norm and pushes the envelope. He is fun to watch and he makes you want to fly. I had a chance to talk to him over the phone before he departs for Finland to the "International Ice and Snow Championships".

So what is the story behind the nickname "Sliceman"?

Well I was always called "Slice" ever since high school. My license plate even says "Slice". But the

person who started calling me by that nickname on the sport kite circuit was Gary Counts[fellow flyer with Lee Sedgewick of Erie, PA] back in Michigan in 1989.

How did it all began for you flying sport kites?

In 1985 I was on vacation in the Outer banks on North Carolina. I heard of this place called Kitty Hawk Kites, which caught my attention since I've always had an interest in kites since childhood. Upon my visit to the store I ended up taking one of those hang gliding classes instead.

How was that?

Awesome. I want to try it again sometime. It was excellent. I guess you could say it is the ultimate kite. While I was coming back down off of the dune from my first lesson I saw this guy flying a huge stack of Trlbys. I was watching this guy (cont.. on pg 3) (Cont..from

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VOICE IN THE SKY

As we approach Spring, there are two very important issues facing sport kite flying today — safety and nurturing.

First, fly safely and sensibly. Choose your flying locations carefully. While you may feel sport kite flyers have as much right to be on the field as everyone else, that is not always true. Our sport demands space, and that means a safe space. Flying as a novice and not understanding this, I've had people come up to me and demand I fly elsewhere. People just don't like being buzzed while sunbathing or walking with their children. So what is the solution? Use common sense. Try flying at off hours or speak with the proper authorities who have some jurisdiction and look into setting aside a site just for kite flyers. Present yourself in a professional manner. If you're a member of a local kite club, utilized the power of your organization. Or for a challenge, fly on extremely short lines. It really is a lot of fun.

Second, nurture our sport. I remember when I was a novice flyer and encountered some difficult times with my flying, whether not knowing the right way to do something or just not knowing what to do.

When you see a flyer having difficulties, land your kite, walk over and offer to help. Who knows, you may meet your future teammate or someone who will show you a tip somewhere down the road.

This sport needs new blood to grow. Nourish it, and like a garden the seeds you sow will soar up to the clear blue sky.

Gilbert Velazquez
Publisher

LEARN TO FLY

IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

Introducing:

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by Master Class Competitor & Instructor

Dodd Gross

(1993 Eastern League Champion)

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pg 1) getting dragged across the beach so I just had to try it. After a brief lesson it was dragging me around, so I said "Ok where do I sign up"? I wasn't about to buy a hang glider, the Trlbys seemed a lot little easier to get started in.

So I bought a triple pack of Trlbys and flew on the weekends while I enjoyed listening to music as I was flying. I would imagine them being choreographed to the music. I didn't realize that this was just what was going on in stunt kite competitions. I found this great spot on the water's edge of Croton Point Park which is a peninsula that sticks out on the Hudson River. This was my regular flying spot up until about a year ago. Unfortunately it has been closed down due to an adjacent landfill leaking toxic fumes in that area.

What opened the door for you to enter the competitive arena?

In the spring of 1988 several things happened that catapulted me into this sport. I read an article in the New York Times about a store called Big City Kites in New York City. In that article it mentioned there was an East Coast Championships [ECSKC] coming up in Wildwood, New Jersey. I said "Championships, I've got to go" So I bought a Spinoff and started to practice precision maneuvers. It was a big departure from the Trlbys because I was used to flying to music. The Spinoff was always falling out of the sky on me, I didn't know how to tune it.

So Now you're at the East Coast Championships. What happened next?

Those three days in May of 1988 totally changed my life. Because I met some great people and was hooked on the fuel of the whole atmosphere of this sport. It was there that I saw some great performances by Lee Sedgewick, Sue Taft and Gary Counts. Although I hadn't met them personally yet, I was in awe over their flying. There

were several wind delays when it was my time to fly in Novice Precision. To my surprise several people from Spyrojet [Canadian kite company] offered to let me fly their kite. The Spyrojet was one of the first light wind kites around. I crashed in almost every maneuver finishing 15th that day.

"There has to be opportunities in the music for me to work with that kite at that time. I have to hear the little things that happen in either the lyrics or the music and from that I mentally see what the kite is doing."

Did that discourage you from competitions?

No not at all. I had so much fun at the banquet and meeting some great people from all over the country. I was just fueled by all of the energy and enthusiasm. You know there where some people that I meet at ECSKC 88 that I've never seen again. One person who really helped me out with my kite was Chuck Walters. He really is a principal person on the sport kiting scene. His technical advice really made a difference for me. I learned so much those three days than I did in all of the previous three years I was flying. His performance to George Michael's "One more try" was unbelievable. After that event I went out and bought that tape to see if I could do the things I saw Chuck do in that routine. I would use that song as a test song of my abilities with my kites over the next several years.

That following month and a half I had concentrated so much on my flying, that all that I was doing was flying, eating, sleeping and flying. I just had to be ready to fly ballet in front of a crowd of people. I wanted to feel that experience. By then I started getting my hands on

all of the kite magazines around. In one magazine there was an article on a competition coming up in San Francisco. I said to myself ready or not I'm going.

So were you ready?

Oh yeah. I heard this song by Steve Winwood on the radio and after the first 30 seconds I knew this was the music I wanted to fly to in San Francisco. At this event there was only an Open event for ballet. There were no classes like we have now. So here I was up against the best. In one summer I went from being 15th in a Novice event to being in an Open event with some of the great icons of this sport, like Ron Reich, Sue Taft, Pam Kirk, Eric Streed and Lee Sedgewick.

Where did you go from there?

Well after I finished on the West Coast Championships I went to the Great Lakes Stunt Kite Championships in Michigan in 1989.

So you traveled all over.

I traveled a lot. All of the big name flyers would travel all over the country at the various stunt kite events. I guess that's how I got known widely in such a short period of time.

How did you get involved in innovative flying?

By watching Lee and Gary solo fly. I tried solo flying for awhile but it just didn't seem to click for me. It wasn't until I returned from the West Coast that I really started to concentrate on solo flying as I've done in the past with straight flying. I did my first Innovative fly at Michigan in 1989 where I started solo flying from my hips. I'm pretty sure I was the first person to do that. I started my routine by quad flying my Spinoff and then I would switch to solo flying the other Spinoff from my hips.

I remember the first time I saw you fly from your hips to David Bowie's "Lets Dance" at the New York Stunt Kite Championships 1992. That was incredible!

I worked on that for quite some time. Even during the winter months I would be out there flying after work even if the wind chill was minus 20 degrees. I would be at this park in Peekskill with the lights from the train station illuminating me and the kite while the kite would fly in and out of the light. It was quite ominous. I started out with an old belt for a hip harness, eventually I switched to a hurricane harness.

So in competitions will you select from a repertoire of songs to fly to?

Yeah, depending upon the conditions that's exactly what I do. I like to have a couple of different routines available for light to high wind conditions to choose from. After a particular routine has been done a few times I back off from that one and pull up some new ones.

Is there a favorite type of music you like flying to?

Well it's kind of hard to pinpoint a particular style of music. I've flown to Steve Winwood, Mariah Carey and Paul McCarthy to name a few. There has to be opportunities in the music for me to work with that kite at that time. There are things that I've done with older kites to a piece of music that I couldn't do with today's kites. I have to hear the little things that happen in either the lyrics or the music and from that I mentally see what the kite is doing.

Are you also involved in judging on the Eastern League?

Only recently I've done some judging, not a whole lot. Back in 1992 I couldn't judge due to my sponsorship with Cobra Kites. That sponsorship ended at the end

of that year on a bit of a sour note because I couldn't commit to the kind of schedule they wanted me to do. In 1993 that certainly prevented me from attending to as many events as I would have liked to. But this hasn't soured me on using the Scorpion [manufactured by Cobra Kites] consistently in my performances. That's how much I like that kite.

Certainly one of the highlights of 1992 was that I was invited to a kite festival in Japan. The Japan Kite Association paid for my traveling expenses for this annual event. The reason I ended up going was that the invitation was extended to Kathy Goodwind [Goodwind Kites, Seattle, WA]. She was a key flyer on the West Coast and has known me from my flying at several events on the West Coast. Well she was asked to bring along three professional sport kite flyers to this event. Originally Lee Sedgewick and Sue Taft were asked to go. Well they couldn't make it so she thought of me. I'll never forget the message she left on my machine saying I have to talk to you about a trip to Japan. I was like JAPAN! I can't go to JAPAN. But I thought about it for short while and said "Ok I can go to Japan". It was quite an amazing event. There was just miles of kites along the beach. They also had this massive sound system on the demo field for the sport kite flyers. No matter where you were on the field it sounded like you had a walkman on.

Where else have you been?

Well in a few weeks I'm leaving for Finland. Me and Steve Shapson of Force Ten Foils are going the International Ice and Snow Championships in Kajaani, Finland.

Let me guess you are guys are going ice skiing?

Well, we call it wind skiing. We'll be using Force Ten Foils at this event. Steve wants to promote this sport internationally to people who

would naturally have a interest in it. Under similar wind and snow/ice conditions we can usually go much faster than ice board sailors. We're not sure if we are going to participate in the actual race or just fly for exhibition purposes. It should be interesting.

What is your feeling on the where the sport is going?

Well it has certainly grown more. Its seems that the rules are always changing. It has a different feel to it than when I started in this several years ago. It's hard to pinpoint it. It's just a feeling. I've kind of reach a point where I've completed what I've wanted to do competitively. I don't think I'll compete much this year, unless it's an event that I just really want to fly in. To give you an example in 1989 I competed in Michigan, Wildwood, San Francisco and Hawaii and none of those events had anything to do with the other. I was just enjoying gearing myself up for each of those events and not having to worry about league points or being eligible for the conference. This is the kind of complication that I don't care for in the sport today.

I just can't go and enjoy competing for the sake of competing. Last season I just didn't like the feeling that if I didn't fly in every event or keep my standings in the league then I'm going to get shut out from the Grand Nationals because of a lack of league points.

So where does the Sliceman go from here?

I'm going where there is more wind powered, fun, movement...kiting. I'm working real close with Steve from Force Ten. So I hesitate calling it kite skiing. Steve likes to call it "Foil Flying" as opposed to kiting. I just want to have some fun.



Spring Again!

Ease me down, pull a little more on the right, easy...Touchdown! You know the sun warmed sand feels so good on my wingtips. Lets rest on the sand for awhile.

Who is that coming over? Must be those fellow kite club buddies from the other side of town. Oh yeah, I remember that guy, he thinks he is the sport kite guru of them all. Hey! Watch where your grabbing at pal! What did I hear "new spars" All right! It's about time these old carbon bones of mine got replaced. Will you look at this, I'm going to show off to the whole bunch now. Okay what will it be this time? It looks like a hair line ground pass with a snap stall and landing. Ok lets show them. Easy on that ground pass, boy was that close. Get ready for the snap stall- PUSH NOW! Touchdown!

What a day. I feel alive again. Now as I'm rolled up and put in my case I'll know for sure I'm flying the blue skies once again in just a few more days.

It's Spring again.

It's so dark in here. Every time I hear the sound of the closet door opening, it sends tingles down my spine. My skin is so packed and wrinkled, will I ever fully recover from this long cold winter? Wait! I hear something. Oh please! Let it be this time (SLAM!). Oh no not again. The only thing that has kept me holding on this long is thinking back to those heavenly afternoons on the beach soaring in those steady on shore winds. It seems an eternity since last summer.

I've lost count. I guess I'll go back to sleep and reminisce of days long since passed. Click..click... Another false alarm? Wait! I'm actually being picked up. Could this really be happening, am I actually moving? As I hear the car ignition turn over I know this has to be for real. Once I hear the sounds of the waves crashing against the shore then I'll know for sure I'm finally going to fly again.

Open that draw cord, and let me out of here. There it is, the clear blue sky. Oh what a beautiful sight. My skin feels so energized as I'm stretched out on the sand. Come on and hurry up with those spars. OUCH! Hey watch how your putting those spars in, I'm not exactly warmed up yet. I guess you're a little rusty. Hmm...The wind feels like a steady six. Okay, easy does it. Using 80lb line today? Good, it'll give me a chance to stretch out for those gusty days. I'm leaning back awaiting for that beautiful first tug. Yee haa! I'm flying.

As I do loop after loop, I feel the wind ripple through my skin sending new life to my winter stored body. Come on now, enough of the loops lets do some fancy footwork. I remember last summer we were working on doing that perfect axle

roll. Well I feel good today so how about going for a double axle roll. It looks good, I'm rocking back and forth. All right! Hey watch out! ##!***?!**##* Now that hurts. I think we better stick to the loops for awhile, we're both obviously out of shape.

As the hours pass, I can feel my frame getting a bit tired. The landings have been looking smoother as the day progressed. Is he going for a spike landing from up here? Hey wait, I don't think we're ready for this. Oh brother here goes the power dive. Don't play it too close. Come on pull up... What are you crazy, I said PULL UP! Now that's cutting it close.

I think this is going to be a pretty good season for us. Looks like we're doing a leading edge landing now.

FLYING IN A BLUE DREAM...

by Gilbert Velazquez

It borders between reality and a dreamscape.

The flight of the mind severs the grasp of earth and allows the dreamer to fly. Is it the wind at my back that gives me a fresh gasp of life with every breath I take?

Am I dreaming or am I flying?

Not a soul in my sight, not a sound but the wind. Could a child feel the serenity I've encountered, or would it take the passage of life and time to allow someone to appreciate what I'm feeling?

Am I dreaming or am I flying?

A visitor ever so quickly passes by my wing.

I've never noticed the detail of the hawk so free, so precise. Am I the intruder or just a passing friend? Before I can answer, the wind has taken the visitor away.

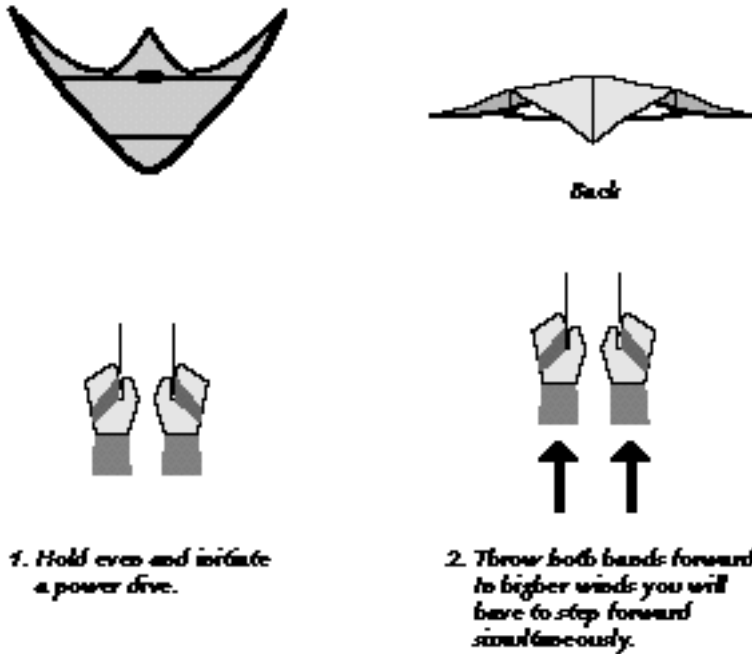
Could this be a blue dream or is this flight?

I danced among God's wing and left the umbilical of mother earth. It's time I land and call it a day.

I was flying in a blue dream.

One Move can go a long way in the sky.

Fig 1. Reverse Turtle



Sport kite flying is multi-dimensional. It is more than just up and down, left and right. To extend beyond that you have to think in three dimensions and how the kite will react to your position and the wind window simultaneously. By just learning one translation of movement of your kite's position, you can produce several variations.

Let's look at the **Reverse Turtle** (fig 1). Initiate a power dive then quickly throw both hands forward. The nose of the kite will now be pointing away from you with the trailing edge facing you. Depending upon the wind conditions you may have to move forward as well. This could either be taking a quick step forward or actually jumping forward as you initiate the reverse turtle. You can perform this maneuver anywhere in the wind window.

A variation of the reverse turtle would be to start moving forward once you initiate the reverse turtle. The key here is to watch the pitch of the nose relative to your forward motion. In low winds you do not want to move forward too quickly or the kite will stall out on you. What should start to happen is the kite will begin to glide down at a very slow speed while staying horizontal to the ground. This is known as a **Fly Away** (fig 2). Use

this maneuver to either gain field in a low/no wind scenario or to land the kite while holding it in its belly position as it approaches the ground.

A second variation would be to initiate a reverse turtle just a few feet before hitting the ground while quickly stepping forward. This is known as a **Pancake** or **Belly Landing**.

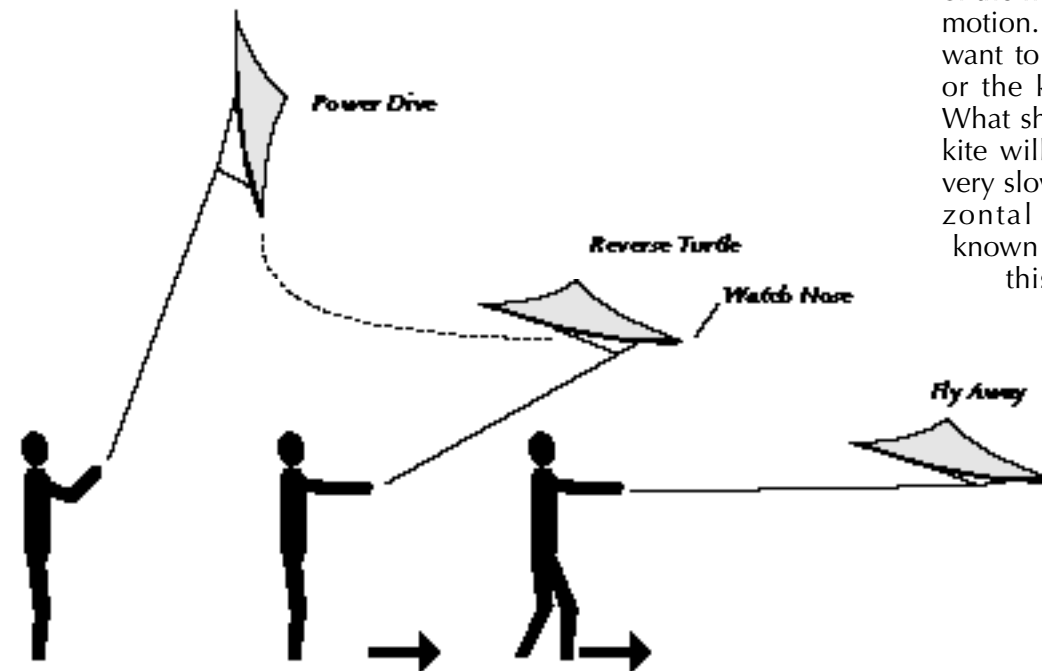


Fig 2. Fly Away (side view)

You may need to walk or run forward depending upon the wind conditions. Watch the pitch of the kite's nose. Too much pitch and the kite will stall out.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Take it a step further, and initiate what looks like a pancake but ever so gently pull on one line and release on the other. This will induce a rotation of 180 degrees (fig 3). Then pull on both lines to

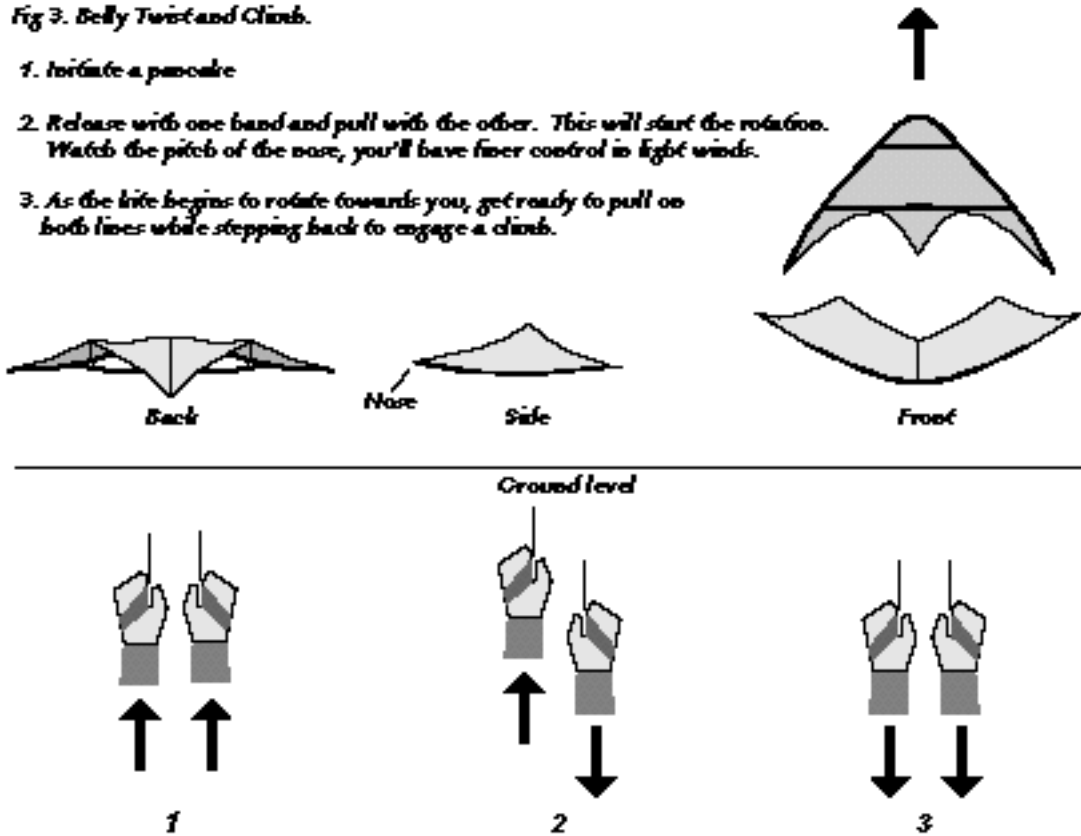
resume a climb. I call this a **Belly Twist and Climb**.

Remember, there are three things working together here. The kite, your body's movement relative to

the kite and the wind window and wind speed. All of these elements are the synergy that will take your flying to great heights.

Fig 3. Belly Twist and Climb.

1. Initiate a pancake
2. Release with one hand and pull with the other. This will start the rotation. Watch the pitch of the nose, you'll have finer control in light winds.
3. As the kite begins to rotate towards you, get ready to pull on both lines while stepping back to engage a climb.



Glossary:

Translation: A shift movement of a configuration to new coordinates parallel with the old.

Wind Window: An imaginary arc about 120 degrees in front of you in which your kite will fly. This area grows and shrinks depending upon the strength of the wind, the kite you are flying, your skill level, and obstructions which are behind you (up wind). (Courtesy of DJ Sport Kites - Windsor, PA)

Synergy: Combined action or operation such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the parts taken independently.

WINGS & THINGS

Flight School

by Master Class Flyer/Instructor
Dodd Gross

This videotape has something for everybody. Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned flyer, Flight School will either show you that flashy maneuver or fine tune your seasoned flying skills. With just about 20 minutes of video, Dodd overviews the necessary flying moves anyone would ever need. One of the most important things he emphasizes in the beginning is

the concept of "The bridle is your friend". This is an important fact that can keep the novice flyer from getting frustrated or making the intermediate level flyer progress to an experienced pilot.

When viewing the individual maneuvers, I found it most helpful using the pause/still button on my VCR remote control. As each maneuver is viewed, I would pause and advance it frame by frame to see the exact movement of the kite as he performs the various maneuvers. A suggestion for the beginning to intermediate flyer

would be to review and practice each of the advanced maneuvers one at a time. It just may be too much to attempt in one day out on the flying field. The indoor flying sequence with the Rev I was most breathtaking. He makes it look so easy.

There is a follow up video in the works which will focus more on competitive readiness and style.

Once again, Dodd Gross reaches out to teach and nurture sport kite flying.

-GV

Where to Fly

April 16

Festivals of the Skies

Dorbrook Park
Colts Neck, NJ
908-542-1642

April 16-17

Philadelphia Kite Festival

Philadelphia, PA
215-736-3715

April 23-24

Spring Games

Myrtle Beach, SC
Kligs Kites
803-448-7881

May 7-8

Mid Atlantic Stunt kite Championships

Ocean City, MD
Sky Festivals Productions
215-736-3715

May 27-30

East Coast Stunt kite Championships

Wildwood, NJ
Sky Festivals Productions
215-736-3715

June 4-5

Sky Sail

Cape May, NJ
609-884-3444

June 4-5

Rogallo Kite Festival

Nags Head, NC
919-441-4124

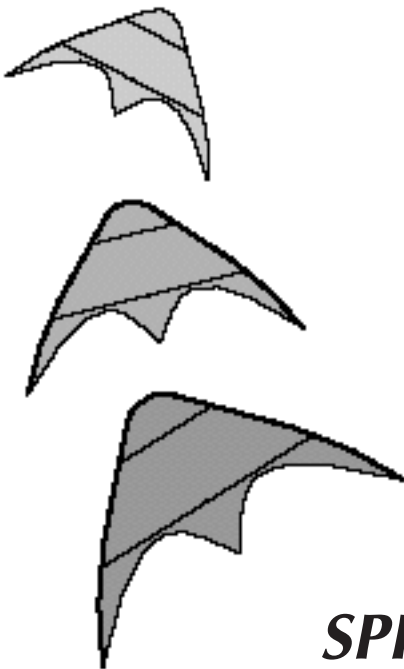
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