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WORLDWIDE PARAGLIDING AND PARAMOTORING MAGAZINE. FOR FREE.

## KIRSTY CAMERON



Sandrine C

Even the men have to admit that out-flying Kirsty Cameron on a paraglider is easier said than done these days! This week we managed to catch up with Kirsty, female winner of the 2014 Coeur de Savoie Paragliding World Cup, British women's champion and on the overall podium in the British Open in Gemona, for an interview.

*By Ruth Jessop*

**free.aero** When, where and why did you start paragliding?

**Kirsty Cameron** In the late 90s at university. My uncle used to fly hang-gliders and as a child our family used to go and watch him fly.

**free.aero** Which have been your most memorable flights so far?

**Kirsty Cameron** My two most memorable XCs are both from 2012 and both flying the R11 in the UK, but very, very different flights. The first was in the Scottish Highlands, flying with Guy Anderson through Glen Coe and then down the West Coast of Scotland past Oban. The scenery and views were out of this world.  
<http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/2012770.html>



Flying over the Cairngorms during the North South Cup, May 2014

<http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/2014883.html>

Photo by Alex Coltman

The second was just two weeks later and in stark contrast was a southern England flatland flight from my local site Milk Hill in Wiltshire, when I set the 2nd longest paraglider flight in the UK, landing 233km away in Norfolk.

I was on my own for 200km of the flight, apart from a few friendly sailplanes, and the thermals and wind were strong, meaning town after town drifted past really quickly, like I was in some kind of dream.

<http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20121058.html>

**free.aero** Which were the best and worst moments for you during the two weeks of the Coeur de Savoie Paragliding World Cup in France and the Brits in Gemona, Italy?

**Kirsty Cameron** The best moment was when the results were posted on the door of the HQ in Gemona and I saw that I had finished 3rd overall in the British Open. I was so excited and happy. To finish on an overall podium at a comp is a dream come true, especially given we had 5 good tasks! I also managed a 2nd place finish on one of the tasks too and I've not done that before either. Topping the female podium at the PWC was also pretty special, especially given how difficult the conditions were at times. I had to deal with just one serious collapse during the comp, but I witnessed plenty of others, it was full on flying, at times in windy chopped up thermals.

*“In Gemona Kirsty was leading out, she was flying like a demon”*

Chris 'Calvo Burns, meet Director at Gemona.

**free.aero** Who are your main rivals – male and female?

**Kirsty Cameron** Currently amongst the women it would have to be Seiko Fukuoka and Nicole Fedele, and currently amongst the Brits Emile Van Wyk, Guy Anderson and Adrian Thomas.

**free.aero** The rivalry is obviously mutual, as Emile's first words coming into goal recently were, 'Finally I've beaten Kirsty.' Do you think men and women can compete on an equal footing in paragliding competitions?

**Kirsty Cameron** On the surface of it there seems no reason why we can't. However, delve a bit deeper and there are reasons why in some ways things are not so equal. Physically most women are smaller than men, which puts us at a disadvantage, because bigger gliders fly better than smaller ones and for many women the smallest gliders are still too big for them, meaning they have to fly with impractical amounts of ballast, and even then they are left struggling at the bottom of the weight range of their glider, meaning poorer glider handling and a greater likelihood of collapses. Fortunately I'm quite tall at 5'10" meaning I don't have to fly a really small glider and I can fly with minimal ballast. Mentally things are different for women too, for reasons that don't attract women to the sport in the first place, and for those that do compete there are issues to face, which I think are not there generally for men. Flying is a solo activity, it's not a sociable team sport in the air, and it requires a very independent mind set. This I know, from talking to female friends who do not fly, is something that puts off many women from taking up the sport in the first place. Men are more fearless generally than women. Women have a greater sense

of self preservation, whereas men have more of a do or die attitude, which lends itself well to pushing on in competition tasks, by taking more risks, no matter how calculated, they would I'm sure say, they are being in their risk taking.

Having said all that, there has been, and there continues to be, a small group of us female pilots quite capable of giving the men a run for their money, and long may that continue

**free.aero** Is there anything that you would like to see change in the British and international comp scene?

**Kirsty Cameron** I think it's a shame our sport is so poorly publicised in the media and so poorly funded in general. On the other hand if we had the same funding and exposure as say tennis, or motor racing then I suspect there would be far more accidents in competitions with pilots racing for big money.

**free.aero** Do you have any sponsors?

**Kirsty Cameron** I am currently sponsored by Fly Sussex Paragliding, who assist with funding of my glider and the rest of my flying kit.

**free.aero** What did you think of the Flymaster that everyone used in the PWC?

**Kirsty Cameron** The Flymaster Live has some great new features, but some of those features are not perfectly implemented yet in practice and need to be before they can totally replace existing ways of doing things. Transmitting the task direct to the instrument does not always work and so I would not want to rely on it as my primary instrument for flying the task. However, some of the other features, like forcing you to report in when landing by emitting a horrible noise until you press a key to report your status, are really good safety features.

[free.aero](#) What do you think of your current glider and instruments?

Kirsty Cameron The Enzo 2 is wonderful. I loved flying the R11 and the Enzo 2 is much closer to that experience than the Enzo 1. The Enzo 2 and the R11 before it are the first paragliders I have owned that I can truly say are gliders.

There are so many instruments to choose from now and it's interesting times with so many decent apps being released on tablets. I'm still not decided on what set-up to go with next and so at the moment I am sticking to my trusty old Flytec 6030 for comps coupled with a VerticaV2 running Memory Map with CAA airspace for XC.

I do think though that the days of the dedicated purpose build flight instrument are numbered, because apps running on tablets/e-readers are improved and updated much more frequently than traditional flight instruments.

*Kirsty is flying the best I've ever seen her flying, on a par with the best men*

Ulric Jessop, Paragliding World Cup Association Technical Delegate

The World Cup live tracking system  
Photo by Ulric Jessop



**free.aero** Have you ever been tempted to move abroad like so many other British pilots?

**Kirsty Cameron** No not really. I actually like living in the UK and when the flying is good here, it's stunning!



Flying with Jamie Messenger, over the M4 approaching Swindon on XC from Selsey, May 2014  
<http://www.xcleague.com/xc/flights/20141052.html>  
Photo by Jamie Messenger

**free.aero** Where is your favourite place to fly in the UK and in the world?

**Kirsty Cameron** For me, in terms of flying big distance, the south of England has proved the place to be. All 3 of my 200km+ flights have started from sites in the south, or midlands. I have flown in several countries worldwide, including

Australia, Mexico and South Africa, but still my favourite is St André les Alpes in France. I have flown a comp at St André, or nearby, every year since 2007. It feels like a playground designed specifically for racing paragliders, set in an area of true beauty.



St André les Alpes, France  
Photo by Ulric Jessop

**free.aero** *Would you like to do the X-Alps?*

**Kirsty Cameron** No. Well actually yes, or at least I'm in love with the idea, but unfortunately I suffer with a weak neck and shoulders, which I know would not cope with the daily endurance of the X-Alps.

**free.aero** *Have you ever thrown your reserve?*

**Kirsty Cameron** No. I would have last year after being hit by a dust devil shortly after launching at the Brits in Portugal, but I was so close to the ground, that by the time I'd caught my breath I hit the ground hard with a twisted glider above my head. My very next action, had I had the height, would have been to pull my reserve. I was very lucky, no broken bones, but some spectacular swelling and bruising to my left hip and pelvis!

**free.aero** *How does your partner feel about you paragliding?*

**Kirsty Cameron** Emma is very supportive and actively follows my progress at comps and when I'm flying XC. However, understandably, she does worry about me getting injured, which is not surprising, given I've had a few scares over the years, as have other good friends who fly. I always fly

with a Spot these days, even on XC, which I know Emma finds reassuring, as do I.

**free.aero** *What sort of flying articles would you like to read in Free Aero?*

**Kirsty Cameron** The best magazine articles are ones of pilots having adventures in wild places, previously undiscovered by paraglider. So lots of those and less of the ones about flying between turn-points, those are really dull.

**free.aero** *Have you ever tried paramotoring?*

**Kirsty Cameron** No. I've no interest at all. The biggest motivator that keeps me paragliding is the challenge of what I can achieve by using the wind and thermals alone.

**free.aero** *What other sports do you do?*

**Kirsty Cameron** I'm not that big in to other sports these days. I used to race small yachts before I got bitten by the paragliding bug. These days it's long country walks and swimming once a week. Blimey, that sounds so middle aged!

**free.aero** *Many thanks Kirsty for a great interview and best of luck flying in the future.*



Kirsty flying in the Paragliding World Cup, Coeur de Savoie, France, May 2014  
Photo by Ulric Jessop