



The throttle control is wide enough to accommodate a gloved hand



The kill switch is well within the thumb's reach



To reach full throttle, just close the fist



The Cameleon fits neatly on the index finger. The sheath is held in place on the outside of the forearm by a velcro strap

MINI REVIEWS CAMELEON THROTTLE SYSTEM

Free your hands up in flight. Edward Lichtner tries out the Cameleon throttle system.

Photos: Vincent Beutter

The Cameleon is a newly designed throttle control for paramotors and motorised hang gliders, designed by French company AEF Gliders. The idea is to move the throttle to the outside of the pilot's hand, so that the palm stays free to firmly grab whatever it needs: brake handle, trim tab, stabilo line, whatever...

Made of a strong polycarbonate, the Cameleon sits on the index finger and throttles up with a flick of the finger. It fits on just about any paramotor with no major modification to the frame or carb. If you don't like it, you can take it out and fit the original throttle back into place in less than an hour.


In flight, the control feels just right straight away; simply squeeze your hand into a fist to accelerate.

The system also explores some interesting new concepts. The side switch is an On/Off toggle: hit the 'Off' side and the ignition remains off until you switch it back to the 'On' position. This means that if an onlooker plays with the prop or the pull starter while your machine is unattended, there is no chance the engine may fire up and ruin both his day and yours. To start the engine, flick the side switch back to 'On' and pull the rope! Pressing the 'On' switch further down will activate the electric starter if the paramotor is equipped with one. Another point worth mentioning is that the position and resistance of the side switch makes it easy to reach when needed, yet unlikely to be hit by mistake.

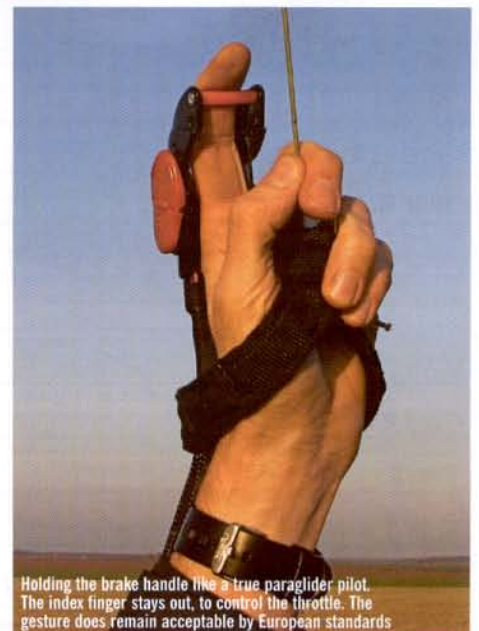
The Cameleon also provides a cruise control system that blocks the throttle at its current setting. Even when the cruise control is engaged, RPMs can be adjusted by gently pushing the throttle forward or back with the index finger. Little clicks are felt along the way as the setting adjusts. To engage the cruise control, the pilot presses a switch on the top of the throttle (the other hand is needed for this). To disengage, just press the 'On' part of the side switch. This, in itself, is a very clever safety measure: As the side switch is set to 'Off' when the engine is not in use, pressing 'On' before starting the engine automatically releases the cruise control if it happens to be engaged, so there is no risk of starting the engine with the cruise control set to high RPMs.

The icing on the cake is the freedom to squeeze one's hands through the brake handles, to take a wrap and hold on to the brake lines as most of us do when paragliding. This is something that many paramotor pilots have been requesting for years. The increased wing control is absolute bliss, especially when throwing wing overs or flying a precision task.

All in all, the Cameleon is a real improvement over traditional throttle controls that makes flying safer and very much more enjoyable. Competitors and display pilots shouldn't even consider living without it. But at 175 Euros a go (tax included), mainstream pilots will have to decide if the pleasure is worth the price. AEF Gliders is currently talking to paramotor manufacturers

interested in mounting it as standard. Independent distributors interested in joining the game are also welcome, says AEF boss Gérard Lésieux. As for the one I have on my machine, well, AEF is going to have a hard time getting it back. 

www.aef-gliders.com



Holding the brake handle like a true paraglider pilot. The index finger stays out, to control the throttle. The gesture does remain acceptable by European standards