



Mini Review The Ascent wrist vario

The best solutions are often the simplest, Bob Drury suggests after trying the Ascent vario

Let's face it! It's a fairly obvious step forward. Yet, until now, nobody has done it. I've long looked at altimeters on wristwatches and thought "why doesn't someone make one of those things beep?" Now finally, a group of smart flying engineers from the States have done just that. In a world ever obsessed with lightweight gear and equipment that doubles up in use what could have been brighter than to combine a vario/altimeter with a watch.

The Ascent looks much like a classic 80's digital watch, the kind that I was envious of as a schoolboy. Chunky and sophisticated looking, it staddles your wrist and definitely shouts "Look at me, and I am something very useful tool!" Maybe in this day and age you'd prefer the ultra-slim look many electronic products have taken on, but take a look at the features Ascent have crammed into the unit and you'll start to understand the chunky appeal of the machine.

The vario is a highly sensitive unit that displays your climb rate as an average reading that can be set to a value of between 5 and 60 seconds.

The sound can be selected from a choice of four different styles. Two have been optimised to give the longest battery life and two are more familiar vario sounds that will make most of us feel instantly at home with the unit. In extended battery mode the unit gives an impressive ten hours of use. Left alone for more than ten minutes and the machine turns itself back on to stand by and resorts to just displaying the time.

The altimeter uses temperature compensated pressure measurements to give you a choice of either 'relative' or 'absolute' altitude, both of which can be toggled between metres and feet.

In 'Fly' mode the unit displays just the altitude and the averaged ascent rate. The information is displayed on a clear and easy to read display using an LED that gives you a choice of either white text on a black background, or black on white. It's just the information you want and nothing more to clutter your vision. It's this simple approach to the design that really appeals to me. Somehow the designers have managed to cleverly cut away so much of the complicated

button pressing and screen changing that modern varios suffer from and just leave you with the information you need in the cleanest format possible. Then at the press of a button the unit quickly displays one of the other, less important, pieces of information it's recording.

Flick around the four chunky buttons and you'll find a flight logbook that records max height, max and min climb and sink rates, and even max and min temperatures. Connected to your PC with a USB and you can download the lot too to keep a digital record of your flight time.

If all this bundled into a tiny gadget wasn't enough, those clever men in California have even gone one step further and added perhaps the most useful function: they've not forgotten to make the Ascent wrist vario into a handy digital watch too. Thank you, my life as a lightweight pilot is forever changed.

The Ascent Vario is available online and at many good retailers. 

www.ascentvario.com