

PHOTO: NOVA

The Nova Rookie is a low end DHV1-2 glider targeted at the straight-out-of-school pilot, but it can also be flown and enjoyed by much more experienced pilots seeking relaxing and stress-free flying. The Rookie is the glider of choice for Nova designer Hannes Papesh and MD Wolfi Lechner on their home ground in the Austrian Alps near Nova's Innsbruck headquarters.

The Rookie was launched in 2006 as the successor to the Syntax. The Syntax had an interesting design philosophy based on the fact that reducing the aspect ratio of a glider has a performance penalty, but the lower aspect ratio machine that results can be supported by a much smaller amount of line. The reduction in drag from the reduced amount of line can offset the lower aspect ratio, and in fact sometimes a higher performance machine can result yet with the passive safety of a low aspect ratio glider. The Rookie shares this philosophy with the Syntax and retains its planform, aerofoil section, number of cells and long brake travel. Changes, including a further substantial reduction in the amount of line, are a lighter sail, more sail tension, a different curve to the wing and redesigned brake geometry.

The Rookie has a hybrid sail using Gelvenor OLKS for the first 25% of the chord, then Porcher Sport Skytex 9017 (40gm) D0911 for the rest of the chord on both top and bottom surfaces. D0911 is a slightly different version of the long-life E85A coating developed by Porcher Sport. Lines are a mixture of Technora and Dyneema, with Technora in the lower cascades and Dyneema in the upper. The glider is also equipped with swivels in the brake lines, the first time I have seen this on a Nova glider. It comes with a manual, rucksack, inner bag, compression strap, windsock and speed bar. Plus a three-year materials and workmanship guarantee and the one-year Nova Protect covering accidental damage. The Rookie is available in five sizes covering weights from 55 - 130kg all up. The glider supplied for the review was the Medium (85 - 110kg), flown at 109kg.

The rucksack is very spacious and has now had all the little niggles sorted out. Compression straps, pockets for things like helmets and comfort were all good. I was going to praise it to the skies until a plastic buckle on the shoulder strap broke, rendering it useless. Nova has agreed that some problems with bags have occurred and will be sorted out under guarantee.

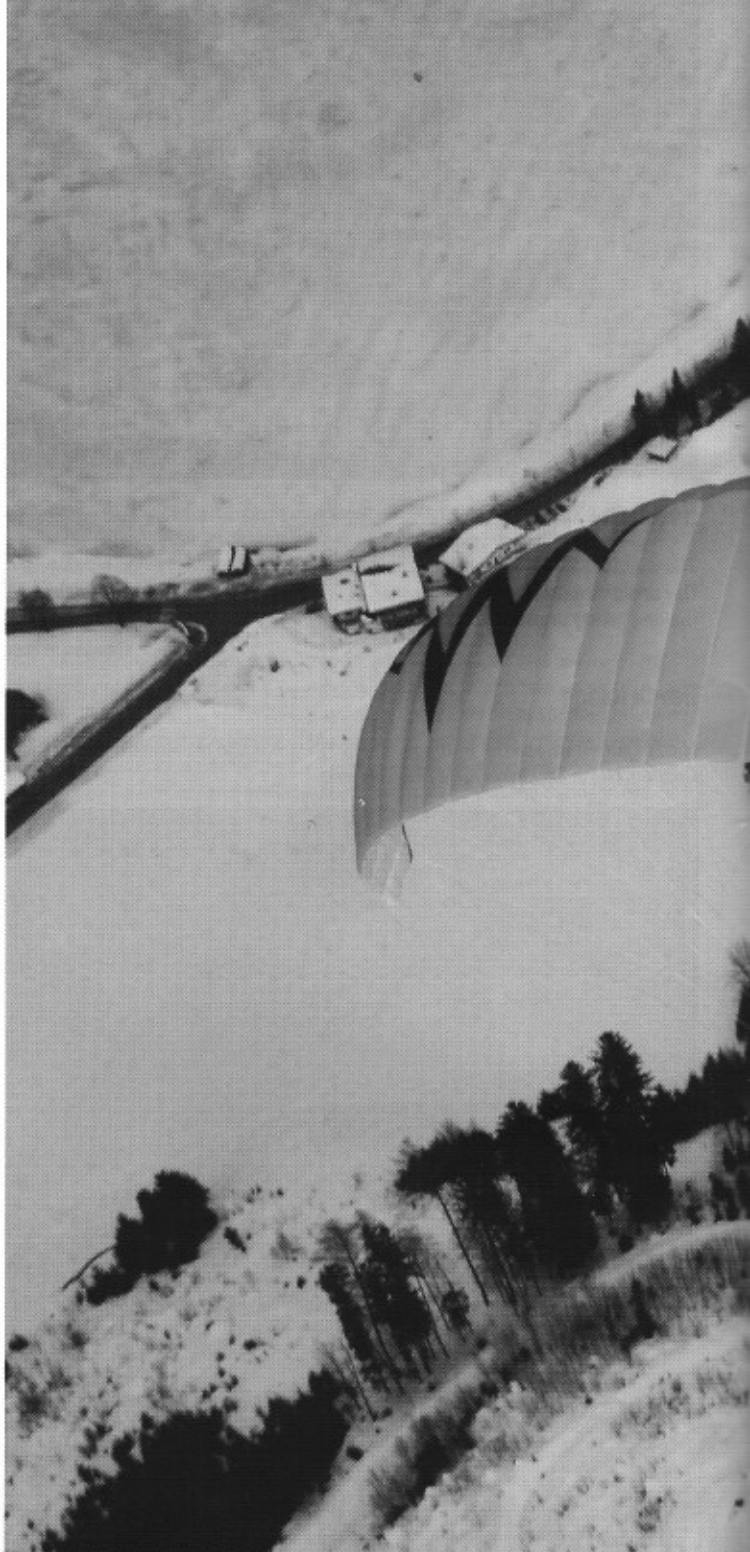
Laid out for take-off the Rookie seems quite low aspect ratio, but checking the manual shows it's 5.12:1 flat. Using the inner As or simply leaning back in the harness gives a very simple inflation. The only issue arising here is that, like all low end DHV1-2s or DHV1s, the brake travel doesn't always allow the pilot to keep the glider on the ground easily in stronger winds using the brakes. As the D riser has only one line on it going to the centre area of the canopy, use of the C risers may be necessary to kill the glider in stronger winds on landing or to keep it on the ground prior to launch. Asymmetric inflations work well too, and once the glider is overhead keeping it there is very easy.

Once in the air the Rookie is simplicity itself. Flying is very relaxing as there are no surprises and it simply needs to be guided where you want it to go, with small amounts of active flying if it's very strong. If active flying is needed on this this glider, it's pretty certain that the conditions are not for beginners. On encountering the first thermal you are reminded that brake input needs to be a bit more than for a top-of-the-range 1-2, but the Rookie banks up very easily and then starts to climb. The climb rate is very rewarding and its ability to make the best of light lift is top-notch. In this respect it is the equal of any glider in any category.

In turbulent or broken thermals there is good feedback via brakes and harness, and the chest strap setting can be used to good effect. The more experienced pilot can open up the chest strap in line with Nova's instructions in the manual (suggested range 45 - 60cm), making the glider more responsive to weight shift and thus more agile. This makes the glider very good in the small pieces of lift found on the smaller sites in the south-east UK. This glider is good fun to thermal and will tolerate mistakes - it doesn't collapse on the edge of strong thermals if you aren't spot on.

Big ears are very easy and any size ranging from very small to very big can be made using the outer split A riser. The ears resist the pull in at first quite hard but once in are not difficult to keep there. On release they roll out quite quickly and evenly. B line stalls are firm to pull in, but once in the load drops and a classic B line stall results, the glider first dropping back then, as the descent rate builds up, sitting slightly forward. The descent rate is quite high if the stall is maintained, but on release it snaps out immediately and flies away without any need for pilot intervention, and in a very confidence-inspiring fashion.

Pulling asymmetrics on one side (both A risers) is hard as the Rookie resists quite fiercely. Pulling the collapse in doesn't result in any loss of height and only a very small heading change unless the collapse is held. Even then things happen quite slowly and the resistance is very high, with the glider inflating immediately you release. The tips do seem to be slightly more fluid than the Syntax's, as I noticed the odd little tug when the stabilo line pulled tight after going slack in turbulence,



PHOTOS: STEVE LUTCH/LEAD

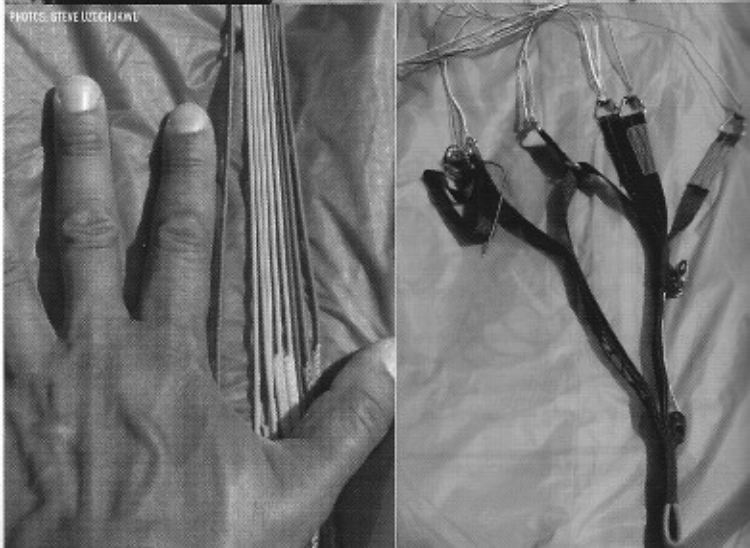


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but the tips did not fold in. Again, this only happens in conditions that are not suitable for low-airtime pilots.

I had a whale of a time spiralling this glider. The first one for me on any new glider is always tentative, so I can see how fast it goes in and how slowly it comes out. The Rookie enters the spiral in an easy and refined fashion, and will recover smoothly but quite quickly. I noticed that with the wider chest-strap setting I had more of a tendency to weight shift into the spiral, and therefore slow the recovery if I did not deliberately centre my weight on releasing the brake. On the tighter setting exit is immediate and very confidence-inspiring. I investigated further and ended up going off the scale on my Bräuniger IQ-Compe, something I have never had the confidence to do on any other glider. Sometimes if I delayed the exit by converting speed to height I could just catch the very tail end of the wake from the spiral, but only just. Asymmetric spirals also worked well.

The speed bar is light to use, giving me 42km/h on the first stage and 45 - 46km/h with occasional excursions to 47 when driven flat out. The glider seems to have exemplary stability on the bar. Trim speed is between 37 and 38km/h so the Rookie is no slouch for a wing certified at this low level. I felt very sure of the bar and used it often, obviously with the caveats for avoiding very turbulent air.

The Rookie is great when you are trying for the spot. The glide angle goes up a long way when you are in the harness, and degrades very noticeably when you are out. It also tolerates very deep braking to degrade the glide further if you are overshooting the spot. Landing in stronger winds I found I could reverse-concertina it onto one tip, but the C line pull also kills the glider well.

Overall the Rookie is great machine and fantastic fun for the level of passive safety it offers. There is not

much I can find wrong with it, although I met some low-airtime pilots who didn't like the name as it associated them with being novices. But bearing in mind the experienced pilots flying and enjoying the Rookie, why are they worried? Should a name put you off a glider that is otherwise ideal for your level of flying? The same pilots were impressed with the very few lines and performance, and the Tattoo/Mambo colour scheme. The name made not the slightest difference to my enjoyment of the wing. I would thoroughly recommend it to anyone looking for a low-end 1-2, and to the experienced pilot with other commitments who does not get the chance to remain as current as they would like. Performance, fun flying and no stress - an excellent wing from Nova.

Summary



Performance with simplicity
High passive safety
Handling
Very easy flying all round



Rucksack shoulder strap buckle broke after a week
Name not cool enough for some

Importer's comment

Thanks Steve for such an honest and in-depth review. With the Rookie Nova have almost created a new category: a wide market suitable for beginners and experienced pilots alike. The latest issue of the Austrian magazine Gleitschirm measured the glide angle at 8.4:1 - higher than the majority of top-end DHV1-2 gliders and a number of DHV2s. One of the reasons is its lack of lines; total line consumption

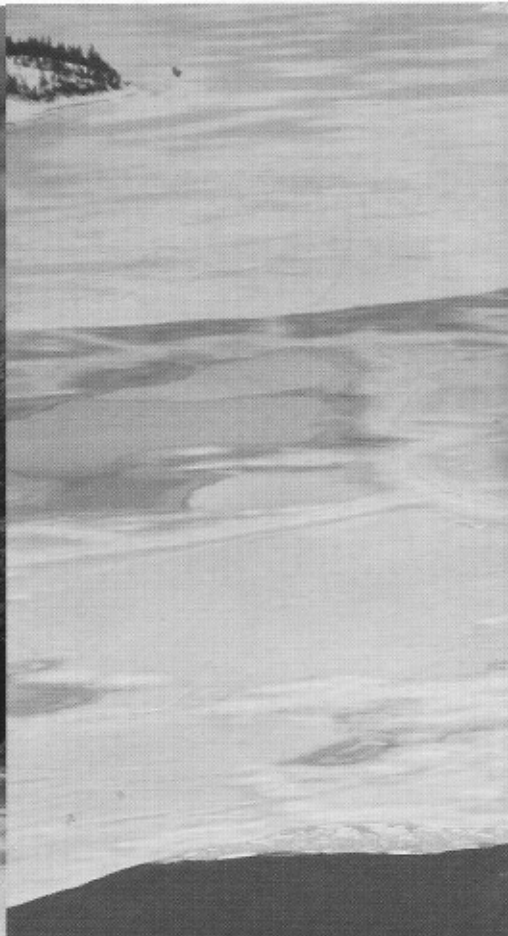


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for the Medium is 268m, 100m less than its predecessor the Syntax. Regarding the rucksack (not made by Nova), Steve is right. Some weaker buckles found their way into the manufacturing but this has now been rectified.

Although the name might suggest a beginner's wing, the Rookie is much more. I can only ask pilots considering a new DHV1-2 glider to try it. With its great performance, exemplary climb/sink rate, direct handling and safety never seen before on such a performance wing, it's at home on the ridge or XC thermalling at base. In addition, Nova offer their unique Nova Protect one-year accidental damage insurance free on all their wings!

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