

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

ADVANCE OMEGA 8

EN D

Has Advance's three year Omega cycle produced another stallion or a donkey? Bob Drury saddles up and takes a ride



Photo: Advance.ch/lazoom.ch

We liked most
The way it thermals. It's beautiful!

We'd recommend it to
Experienced XC and Serial Class comp pilots that want something really comfortable to fly, inspiring to thermal, with the performance to win.

ADVANCE'S DESCRIPTION

The Omega 8 is the highest performance glider in the Serial Class. It has yet again set a new benchmark, just like the Omega Series gliders before it. The new Advance flagship glider embodies tradition and progress at the same time. Its handling and design are unmistakable.

BACKGROUND

Swiss manufacturer Advance have a long pedigree in the sport having been around for over 20 years. With typical Swiss precision they have stuck to a sleek and well-rehearsed marketing and development program throughout that time. Their wings are named simply Alpha, Bi-Beta (tandem) Epsilon, Sigma and Omega after letters in the Greek alphabet, Alpha being the first and Omega the last. When I first flew an Advance wing, a Sigma 2, nearly 20 years ago, the thing that blew me away,

aside from the high tech look of the wing with its funny, sticky-up winglets, was the way it turned. It felt like a buggy in the air, whilst I'd clearly only driven buses before. Almost every Advance wing I've flown since, and I've flown most of them, has had the same impact - save for a strange period around 2001 when they released the Omega 5, which was frankly more of a bus than a buggy. Founding designer Robert Graham was leaving to find pastures new at Gin and the normally smoothly purring Advance engine spluttered for just a moment and I wondered if they'd lost it. Not a chance. Aerodynamicist Thomas Ripplinger joined the team, clearly twiddled a few knobs and dials under the highly tuned Advance V8 engine, and Omegas 6 and 7 roared out of the garage with that same smile inducing handling that has brought the company such a faithful following over the years. Based in Thun, a small town at the opposite end

of the lake from the legendary Interlaken. Advance are not only nestled in the heart of the Swiss Alps, but also amongst some of the best pilots in the world. Their development team is one of the most formidable around: World, Euro and PWC champions Chrigel Maurer, Kari Eisenhut and Andy Aebi are all local boys who've found a niche in the Advance development team with PWC champ Andy Hediger and European Champion Greg Blondeau strengthening it further. 2007 World Champion and long time Airwave designer Bruce Goldsmith has recently joined Team Advance bringing another vast pot of design and flying experience. For all their silverware, Advance's Open Class wings have always been highly prized machines only available to the very 'inner circle' of Advance team pilots, for everyone else only Serial Class Advance wings are available, and they come in the form of the Omega series.

CONSTRUCTION

The Omega 8 is unequivocally an Advance product. Its entire look, starting with the shape of the wing with its trademark winglets through to the symmetrical colour scheme, semi-circular cell openings and sleek, high tech riser system, mean the wing stands out visually as the clear heir to the Omega throne.

Like many, Advance have embraced the new plastic wire technology which now follows the curve of the leading edge, reinforcing the profile at the most important place.

The wing itself is a true three-liner, which Advance say has saved them more than 60 m of line on the large size. There are two bands of internal bracing tapes that run across the span, one where the C lines attach and one behind them. The brakes attach to the trailing edge and use Advance's "Ring Ruff system" to bunch the wing tips and create a better turn.

Line layout is simple and clean with the stabiliser line clearly marked and attached to the C riser. The risers are 13 mm black polyester with an elaborate looking speed system that pulls first the A, then the centre three lines of the four B lines, leaving the outermost B line floating on a separate pulley system that gets accelerated less. On the back of the C riser is Advance's Speed Performance Indicator, a clever system of markings that tell you what speed to fly at given the conditions. In a nutshell, the stronger the headwind or sink, or next anticipated thermal, the more bar you push. Magnetic brake poppers and polished stainless steel swivels attach the handles to the risers and lines respectively.

The wing is made out of Skytex 6.6 fabric, with the main sail made from 40 g/m² and the leading edge from 44g/m². The lines are unsheathed Liros Aramid Technora. All proven and established materials.

SO WHAT'S IT LIKE TO FLY?

On the ground the Omega 8 sits almost begging to be launched. The plastic wires really do reinforce the front of the wing and create a solid, uniform leading edge. As with most modern, well-designed wings, a smooth pull on the risers is all that's needed to get airborne. During both front and reverse launches the glider is immaculately behaved.

Once airborne you really get to taste what the Omega 8 has to offer. From the moment I touched the brakes and carved my first turn I knew that the Omega 8 was going to match up to its predecessors in at least one field: handling



in thermals. The precision and ease the wing cut into that first thermal with took me right back to how I felt when I first flew the Sigma 2 in 1992. To use a more recent comparison, it reminded me of the same kind of sensation as its little brother the Epsilon 6 gave me when I reviewed it last year. This is a wing that makes you want to go round and round and round all day long. It's light on the controls and short in brake travel, enabling you to control the wing extremely accurately through small brake and weightshift inputs. This same short and effective braking system means you can bite into thermals with just a quick flick of your hands.

Advance say the wing has got a softer feel than its immediate predecessor, the Omega 7, which allows better feedback. In a video interview on their website Chrigel Maurer talks about how amazing the feedback was on his ultra-light X-Alps wing as a result of the super light cloth. The same effect is felt with the Omega 8, which is close to a kilo lighter than its predecessor.

In turbulence, the Omega 8 is beautifully damped yet responsive. It prompts you with little tugs and shakes down the lines rather than twitchy shudders and heart-stopping jerks. I found that the short, light and precise controls made me want to fly the wing fast. Throw in the really solid leading edge and I was very quickly totally at one with the wing and unflustered by its movements in even really rough air.

Keen to learn more about the Omega 8, I took it down to the British Open in St Andre, France for the last day of the comp. It was a windy, snotty day

that eventually got cancelled, yet on the Omega 8 it was just another day. Even racing against other EN D wings it was difficult to say if it is the "highest performance glider in the Serial Class". However, it's rock solid at speed, on an accelerator that you can stand on all day without needing the legs of a weightlifter, and so comfortable in turbulence that its usable flying range is extremely high for the class. If you aren't winning the Serial Class on an Omega 8, blame your flying not the wing.

I asked around the other Omega 8 pilots in the event how they felt the wing had held up in the racing environment and got nothing but smiling faces and thumbs up. The Omega 8 was winning hearts with everyone that flew it.

CONCLUSION

Another classic Advance wing that sticks firmly to their philosophy of creating wings to make pilots smile. The way it turns is beautiful. It is right up there with the best gliders I have ever had the pleasure of thermalling. If you're into flying serious cross country or Serial competitions and want a wing that will make you feel so really comfortable and safe that you can maximise your flying, then give the Omega 8 a test flight. I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

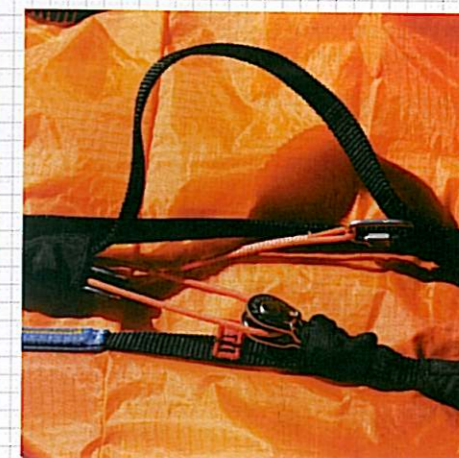
The reviewer

Bob Drury flew the Omega 25 (24.5 m²) at all up weight of 95 kg using a Sup'Air Evo XC harness.

www.advance.ch



Brakes gather the trailing edge



Leading edge reinforcement