

Safeguarding Against Towing with the Sailplanes Spoiler's Open

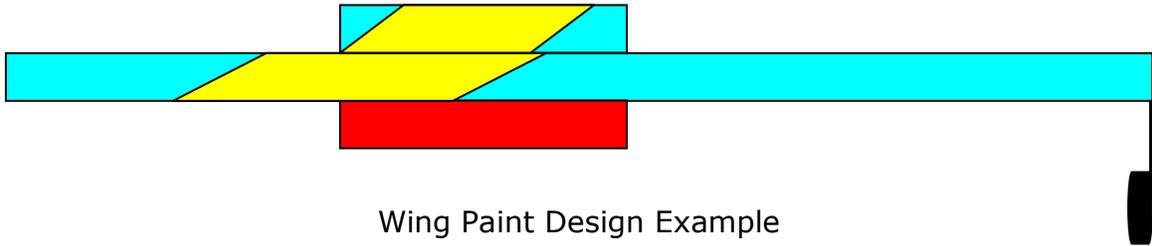
One way to avoid towing a plane with "his" spoilers open is to swivel your head around just before you add that power. If you can't swivel your head, use your mirrors. Check those wings behind you. Are his spoilers open? The fiberglass plane manufacturers are kind enough to make the spoilers orange or occasionally red. This makes them easier to see from the tow pilot's view for sure. On our Schweizer's spoilers we painted the wing design so that it crossed over the spoiler portion of the wing, giving the spoiler a design that contained contrast. The inside of the lower spoiler is painted red, so when open, you can see the bright color. In this way, you have a better chance to see the open spoilers before you add power. Of course, you rely on your trusty line person to check too!

Sometimes a sailplane pilot will not verify his spoilers are indeed locked before take off by opening them and then closing them as he reads his checklist. If he does not physically push the spoiler handle into the "locked" position, then the spoilers will most likely "suck" open on tow. So even if you note that there are no spoilers extended when you add power, this may not hold true for the entire flight! Be aware spoilers may open at any time during the tow.

One kind gentleman brought to my attention a sentence or two in a pilots manual regarding the fact that it may actually be easier to take off with the spoilers cracked open. Some fiberglass pilots feel they *just have to* take off with the spoilers cracked open. The purpose, they state, is to provide greater stability and gain aileron control as quickly as possible. One wing seems always to drop due to the prop wash. Some say opening the spoilers deflects air over the ailerons; some say the spoiler "spoils" the lift on the wing that is trying to fly first. Whatever the reason, it seems some fiberglass pilots will not take off with their spoilers closed. If they insist on having their spoilers open on take off, then it is best, as a tow pilot, to insist that they cycle them just before you roll. That way you'll know their hand is on their spoiler handle and they are not going down the runway oblivious to the fact their spoilers are open.

Do not assume because you are about to tow a fiberglass plane and his spoilers are open, that this is intentional. Do not assume he is aware of this situation and will close them on the roll. Establish contact with him on the radio. If he doesn't have a radio or his battery is dead or for whatever reason you are unable to get him on the radio, try signaling the line boy. If you have separate ground radios, call the line boy on a ground radio and have him ask the pilot to close his spoilers or cycle them. Shut down if need be, get out and walk back to the sailplane and talk to the pilot. One time I towed a fiberglass plane with spoilers open because I assumed he was using his spoilers to aid his take off. I thought he would close them on the take off roll. This did not happen. During climb out, I called him on the radio and he then closed his spoilers.

We do not have a fiberglass pilot on our field who takes off with his spoilers cracked, and for that, I'm grateful. As a tow pilot, always check those wings behind you before you add power. As a sailplane pilot, always use that checklist! ***"Dive brakes closed and locked."***



Wing Paint Design Example