



PRESS RELEASE (6th December 2006)

UP, UP AND AWAY!

The world's first paragliding simulator will be unveiled at the University of Hull this week.

The English weather is a problem for budding paragliding pilots; training days are often cancelled due to excessive winds and unsuitable weather conditions. It comes as a relief therefore for pilots to learn that the University of Hull has come to their rescue with the creation of a paragliding simulator – the first of its type in the world.

Many other institutions were keen to work on the project, but it was the University of Hull's willingness to become airborne and learn how to paraglide, that made them the obvious choice for Northern Paragliding Ltd. The company had been commissioned to find a University to develop a simulator on behalf of the BHPA (British Hand-gliding and Paragliding Association).

Ian Curren of the Northern Paragliding Association commented: "I visited a number of Universities about the project, but decided to collaborate with Hull's SimVis research group due to their wealth of experience in computer graphics and modelling, together with their genuine enthusiasm for the sport."

Project Leader at the University of Hull, Dr Paul Chapman added: "I am a qualified skydiver and made the BHPA aware that I would be willing to learn to fly paragliders. You can't build an accurate paragliding simulator by hiding yourself away in a lab, you need to get up there!"

The simulator will prove to be an effective learning tool because the pilot will be able to learn the paragliding controls, understand thermals and be able to negotiate air traffic before even lifting off the ground. The team has also created a realistic visual simulation where fields, mountains and landing strips can be seen and other paragliders come into view.

Commenting on the results of the creation, Dr Chapman said: "One of the most significant consequences of the simulator is that it will save lives. Paraglider and glider pilots die every year due to human error. By creating a realistic training environment, trainees will be able to learn about such issues as collision-avoidance and the understanding gained will be far more effective than that obtained from watching a video or reading a book."

And the potential of the simulator doesn't stop there, research collaborations with other parts of The University of Hull are taking shape; the Sports Science department are keen to use the simulator to investigate the psychological and physiological effects of exercising in a virtual environment. The Psychology department has registered an interest to use the simulator to research how the decision-making process can break down under high pressure, such as falling towards the ground upside down after the canopy has collapsed.

Last week the simulator prototype made its first appearance at the NEC's 'Sport and Aviation Show' where it proved to be a real crowd stopper, receiving positive feedback from both novice and experienced pilots. The simulator's use is not limited to paragliding - the software has been written so that it can be easily modified for para-motoring or hang-gliding and would therefore open up a huge potential market worldwide. The project will undergo further developments before being manufactured next year.

Dr Chapman concluded: “This has been a thoroughly interesting and challenging project. I am excited about the potential for future developments and I am now hooked on paragliding – I am currently investigating how I can legally fly to work in the mornings!”

Ends

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Images are available on request