## A long tail

Those of you that have seen Close Encounters at a few or more festivals will have noticed that we have a large collection of different types of tails to use depending on the prevailing conditions. I say different types not just meaning the many different colour schemes often coded to the kites that are pulling them across the sky but the way they are made, stored away and set up ready for launch.

In the photo below is an example of just a few of our tails, there are more in the garage – all are in pairs and some there are three, or even four of the same colour!

Generally there are either flat tails or tube tails. Back in the days of Peter Powell the tube tails were sealed at the trailing end and that meant a lot of careful flattening to expel the air whilst rolling up. With those plastic tails people often used to blow down them like a balloon to help the inflation process. I was talking to one of the veterans at Solent Kite flyers who said that Peter liked to see the tails fully inflated and was once heard to say "Why are those people over there flying with the tails flat – They should be blown up like sausages – Tails should look like long sausages!"

Tubes don't seem to affect the drag anymore than flats, nor does the fact that they are inflated, nor even the fact that they are filled with air make them lighter. It's just the overall weight that makes the difference the more material used, the weight of the material and the length of the tail all combine to hinder or aid a flyers performance.

## Accidents happen!

In high winds tails don't act as a brake for the kites. They pull just as hard and the less experienced flyer should avoid practicing near people, car arials, trees and fences. It's easy to forget how far out behind the kite tails flow. At the first Margate festival where the arena was quite small it was only the quick thinking of Bryan from Team Spectrum (Great users of tails themselves with dramatic effects) who saw that my tail had wrapped itself around a banner pole and just grabbed the tail to prevent me from launching and, possibly, taking the pole into the air at the same time.

We still get reminded of when Marilyn did the impossible after a huge gust ripped the kite from her hands at Weymouth one year and dumped kite and two 100foot long tails in the sea. The feat, never to be repeated, was to re-launch all from beneath the water, unaided.

Nearly all the tails we fly are over 30 meters (100ft) long we have some half that length which we use for practice, in ***really*** small arenas and on two of the stacks we have. These can been joined together which is fine until they ride over each other when we do a sequence of tight turns and then catch and lock together at the join!

We fly on lines 40 metres in length so much longer would be a bit of a struggle and remember that we use mostly full size team kites to pull them. We once made a beautiful pair of colour coded tails to exactly match two Tramontanas, one in gold/black and the other in purple/black. The big problem here was that by the time there was enough wind to get everything off the ground, the kites pulled too hard to do anything with them safely.

Which type of tail do we prefer? They both have advantages. Flat ones will fly across a bigger wind range – the specially coated yellow and black ones (team colours) that we use for our Conte routine, are extremely light-weight but take forever to wind back up – especially if they get twisted (volunteers always welcomed). Team Spectrum have some that they fold,

concertina fashion, into boxes. Tubes take longer to make and use up much more room in the bag but they can be scrunched down on to poles providing they are not sealed at on end. These look really spectacular to anyone stood just behind them when the take off – always worth putting the camera on to video. Marilyn reduces the size of the hole on the trailing end making it a tighter fit over the pole and we use a rubber band to automatically close the end of tube after it has slid off the pole. You could just start at the tip of any tail and scrunch it back in to a bag and peg the bag to ground next time you launch but we found this a bit risky when doing public displays because you can sometimes end out with a bit of a knot in one or the other. Sometimes we push the poles in to the ground and let the tails get pulled away by the kite but if the ground is too hard and the poles can' be pushed in hard enough there is a danger that they could be lifted high in to the air before being dumped on some innocent person. What we found to be safer was to drill a hole in the bottom of the pole, put a loop of cord through it and then secure the cord firmly using a tent peg or similar. Use a cut up floatation sleeve – the type you see kiddies using in swimming pools especially on holiday abroad – or some water pipe isolation sponge to help with rolling the tails back up afterwards – the sponge won't hurt anyone if it falls on them – but I suppose in this PC age we should write on them a warning that they are not to be eaten!

If you don't fancy making tails and can't find a trader with any long ones in stock – an idea we have employed was to use barrier tape – the sort you see around road works. Six or seven pounds will buy you about 300 ft from one of the large DIY stores or a builder's merchant and it's OK for a few trips out until it becomes too twisted. Try rewinding it on to a large piece of flat cardboard. It usually comes in either red and white or black and yellow (C.E. team colours – handy that!).

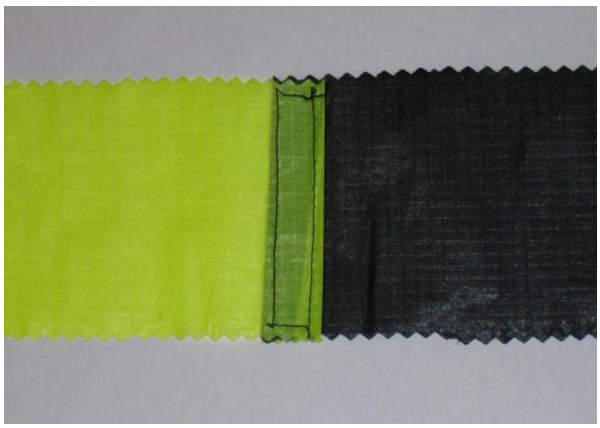
## **Rip** stop

We find making tails extremely laborious, boring and frustrating. After every set we say never again and yet every year we seem to be producing more. Marilyn does all the sewing, the biggest part, and hates it more than I do, but it's good when it's finished – mind you so is banging your head against the wall!

We get the rip-stop nylon from kite traders who usually have a good range of colours but sometimes not so much in the really light stuff like Icarex. We sometimes go to sailcloth shops (where all the "Yachties" go) good stuff but expensive! Don't forget that you will need a good amount of polyester thread!

Flat tails are about seven centimetres wide. We cut them with crimping scissors to prevent fraying and sew them over at the end but if you were really clever you would use a heat gun (something like a soldering iron)

to seal the edges properly. I was going to make a joke here about doing this on the dining room table and see what lovely patterns you make but in this silly world these days – perhaps I won't! The cloth comes in either one or one and a half meter wide rolls – you do the maths but the longer you can make the strips the less



sewing together you do!

For the smallest of tubes strips of eleven centimetres wide is good, sew all the strips together to the length you want then fold it in half and sew 5mm in from the edge. If you sew as well as me go twelve centimetres wide , fold in half and allow for a bit of wobble with a fair bit of swearing and unpicking – I don't do fiddley!

## Outside in

I have known people to lay a piece of string through the sail as they go and when they get to the end, attach it and then pull all the way back through to turn the tail inside out (or with the outside now to the inside). I have no idea if this way works. What we do is to sew the end of the tail get a long piece of sturdy dowelling and push the tail down over it. Just after starting this method and about halfway through, you begin to get doubts if this is actually working but keep going! When you are eventually through, you need to cut off the end and re-hem it if you are going to use poles to store and launch.

Now you need to figure out how best to attach your masterpiece to the kite. To keep the end open we use a small cut-down plastic bottle held in by folding the end of the tail back through it and holding it in place with either glue or staples. (If you prefer to have the wind run right through). I then use a soldering iron to make a couple of holes to put some line through and attach that to one end of a sturdy swivel. Tie a loop of string around the centre T of the kite and attach the swivel to that. Don't tie your tail to the bottom of the kite because the drag of the tail will alter the angle to which the kite presents itself to the wind and it may not lift as easily or fly as well as it should. Please remember that you will be taking up a lot more space in the park now and all those other people have as much right to be there as you – unfortunately!

By the time this article is published there will be some short video clips on our web-site of tails launching go enter three separate words – Close Encounters Kites in to your favourite search engine (mine is Google) and look in galleries/videos/tails launches.

Or, you could always come along to a festival, see them in action and be a volunteer winder upper when we've done. I know that all of the flyers we know who demonstrate with tails take a lot of time in preparing routines that really do paint pictures in the sky and the only real place to see the display properly ids from behind the flyer – that way you get to see what he does! Think about it – if you went to an art gallery, you would not view the paintings from the side, you would stand where the artist did when he created it!

Below is a stack of four large but inexpensive kites pulling two of the tails mentioned earlier with joins in the middle. Each tail is now just over 100ft long.

The pull was so strong that it broke the bridle on the lead kite shortly after this picture was taken.

This article was inspired by a lady who wrote to us asking if we would make her some tails or at least give some hints on how to go about it.

Sorry but I was joking when I said before that Marilyn enjoyed making them – hence these three pages – thinking on – it would probably have been quicker to make the tails!

If we have left any questions unanswered, please feel free to contact us and we will see what we can do.

**Allan and Marilyn Pothecary**

www.closeencounterskites.co.uk