



Wills Wing TIII

Competition-class
Hang Glider Review

by **RYAN VOIGHT**

« I love to fly, and I view the equipment and gear as just a means to one singular focus, **the flying experience.** »

The GPS reads 500 West Blueridge Ave, as we cruise along one of the many multi-lane southern California freeways. Some may recognize the address and will know why my heartrate was building. We were going to Wills Wing and were every bit as excited as Charlie was for the chocolate factory. But this was better because, instead of chocolate, we'd find flying things and carbon fiber!

Through the (greatly appreciated) generosity of Wills Wing, I got to spend a week with a TIII 144 as if it were my own. Truthfully, I wanted to hate it. That's not a typo. It's also not the kind of thing you tell someone as you tie a borrowed glider to a make-shift pool-noodle rack on a rental car. Especially *this* glider—the result of a lifetime of focused innovation and sacrifice, a total embodiment of one's life's work of making hang gliders better in every way. Maybe "I wanted to hate it" is a bit too strong.

I've owned several Wills Wing T2/T2C's, and each was nicer than its predecessor. That's to be expected in a product that undergoes continual refinements. That is, a 2008 T2C is not the same as a 2012 model, and both differ from a 2016 model. Each improvement is progressive and incremental, never warranting a new name. Steve Pearson (WW president and chief designer) has always been adamant about not giving the generations of T2C's new model names, although that would almost guarantee a boost in sales.

Even geriatric hang glider pilots will notice that "TIII" is a new name. And if you're not geriatric, you might have seen Wills Wing's social media giving it absolutely glowing reviews and praise. I don't know if it's the East Coast/New Yorker in me, but when I read such hyperbole I automatically

assume it's exaggerated, over the top, sales marketing. My BS-radar tingles and my defiant side wants to NOT like something *just* because everyone else seems to be overdoing their commendations. Coming from me—someone who literally has Wills Wing embroidered underwear—I thought it was hype.

I was wrong. My pessimism was unsubstantiated. In hindsight, the flight reports I saw were from pilots I know personally and sincerely trust to be honest and straightforward. They also fly way better than I do, making them more qualified to speak to the new model. I still, though, sometimes think I know better, and I was sure this hype was malarkey. If I haven't lost you already, this is *NOT* going to be another glowing rave-review. I'm writing this because I was wrong. I want to give readers greater detail than saying it's amazing (coming

from the manufacturer) and other encomiums I read, just because I didn't have enough meat to fill my sandwich of belief. So let's get to it!

When I unzipped the bag and set it up, it seemed this glider might as well be any of my other T2C's. But aiming a fine eye on the details let me discern some sail panels that are cut and sewn a little differently. The new bottom-surface pattern, with the new W logo, is an obvious difference. It has the same number of battens that go in curved-end first and the same sprog arrangement, with the curved tips going in the same. Yes, I know there are *bearing tips* in there (as all the reviews and marketing squawk about) but who cares? What I care, and care deeply about, is the EXPERIENCE. That's what makes me fall in love (or not) with a glider. I love to fly, and I view the equipment and gear as just a means to one singular focus, the flying experience.

Finally, when I picked it up to go fly, I realized it's notably heavier than my Falcon, which is what I've



ABOVE Setting up a TIII in Big Sur is just like setting up a T2C anywhere else... except for the view | photo by Lindsey Chew. **OPPOSITE** The handling is lightyears ahead of anything I've ever flown, and that makes climbing in this glider a pure delight.



ABOVE The TIII lifts smoothly and is well balanced as it efficiently accelerates through the launch. **BELOW** The author carefully tying the gliders on the rental car. Photos by Lindsey Chew.

mostly been flying. It seemed similar in weight to my last one, which was a little lighter than my older ones. Static balance felt great and controlling both pitch and roll on launch felt familiar and confidence-inspiring. With that first step, the wing started lifting immediately, and the glider accelerated efficiently into flight. The transition from “launching” to “flying” was very clean. Entering the air initiates involuntary smiles every time; you’ve been warned.

In the air the flight characteristics were familiar. It reminded me of spending time with a great friend after being apart for way too long. This flight didn’t feel forced or like work; I was able to use skills from my T2C experience and muscle memory without experiencing a learning curve in this so-called new glider. Its characteristics weren’t identical, though; I noticed that the TIII is able to slow down more easily than any other topless I’ve flown. Thinking about that later, I asked myself if it actually slowed down more, or if it has improved low-speed handling, which means flying slowly is now

controllable. Keeping my word to you and focusing on the *experience*, I guess it doesn’t matter if it’s actually slower or just more controllable. In either case, the flight envelope is expanded.

As we should expect with any new-

age topless hang glider, it climbs phenomenally. Being able to fly it slower, without a doubt, allows for less bank and smaller-radius 360s, a tangible advantage in climb performance. I think climbing with less bank has greater advantages than in sink rate:



Less bank requires less pitch-coordination and way less high-siding is needed, so it's easier and less fatiguing. The climbing *experience* is improved. Dramatically.

After corkscrewing it up, it was time to pull the go-rope (I think some people call it "VG"?). The rope does what its name suggests, no surprise. My last T2C was a 2017 model I had nicknamed *The Rocketship*, because it went so well. The pilot who owns it now flew it in several competitions and did well. I really can't, and won't try to, say if the TIII glides better.

Comparing spec sheets, I can see the aspect ratio for the 144 sq. ft. model has increased from 7.3 to 7.5 (about 3% higher aspect, if I remember how to calculate). Talking to Pearson, he says the TIII has been secretly in development for 2.5 years, with several prototypes flying in competition. His most trusted comp pilots all reported, at worst, having "glide parity." And they often experienced advantages with the latest protos and production gliders. No offense to Pearson or WW, but I don't really care; my last glider was absurd in glide, so more glide isn't what would trigger *me* to spend on an upgrade. I know that isn't everyone's perspective, and so if glide is uber important to you, I do believe that the TIII is la crème de la crème.

Here's what makes me shout: TAKE MY MONEY!:

While gliding from one peak to another at full-VG, a typical bit of thermal turbulence (or whatever) caused me to bank a few degrees and begin going slightly off-heading from my intended direction. Instinctually, I moved over a little and planned to hold that slight input for a second or two until the VG-tight glider started back on course. This was THE definitive *eureka* moment—the moment when I became both flabbergasted and entirely sold on this new model. The response to my correction was immediate. And I mean like, more



TOP Enjoying the glider in clear coastal air over brilliant blue seas—life is good!
BOTTOM Zac Majors launching Crestline, CA on a TIII 154.

immediate than an input at 1/4 VG. I did have more airspeed than min-sink, but I wasn't flying anywhere near racing speed; I was just cruising around best-glide speed.

In a bit of disbelief, I figured this was a fluke, so I gave a small bump input to initiate a turn. The glider turned. If you've never flown high-performance gliders, or VG gliders pulled full-tight, it might sound nutty that I was surprised that the glider turned when I told it to turn. If you *HAVE* flown high-performance gliders, or tried to steer or even fly a straight line at VG full-tight, you know this is a BIG DEAL. It's such a big deal you probably think I'm exaggerating, because it's so good, it's unfathomable.

Obviously, I sported a big grin to match how big a deal this was, a grin that would last the remainder of the evening, as I continued experiencing really, really enjoyable climbing and astounding gliding, even with a drogue-chute of a grin between my ears. This glider is really something you won't believe without experiencing it.

Bringing my flight to an end, I could have used that drogue-chute grin, but I let it slip, as I concentrated on taking extra-special care of this incredible borrowed glider. The improvements in handling shone throughout the landing process, but I did overshoot my intended touchdown spot by more than I can remember doing in a long time. Some might quote this as signifying a glide improvement, and that thought definitely occurred to me. But I like quantifiable information, and maybe I just misjudged the approach. It was a non-event, other than that I'm the type of pilot who is hard on myself and strives for much better accuracy than "somewhere in the LZ," which was how the landing felt!

Over the course of my lustful fling with the TIII, we made our way up the left coast to Big Sur for some sce-

nic flightseeing. We were going to fly Santa Barbara on the way back, but a wildfire and corresponding TFR ruled that out. Instead, we hit Crestline on what was a pretty ripping day. My experiences with the glider continued to solidify the initial impressions.

THIS IS, UNEQUIVOCALLY, AN ENTIRELY NEW GLIDER.

This is not an improved T2C; this is an improved performance hang glider. Everything is improved: all-up glide, handling, maneuverability, increased flight envelope. Everything.

It's sure not what I thought it was... "just another improved T2C with a different name." Nope, it's really something special to fly this glider. *What it does for the overall hang gliding experience is far beyond my writing ability to accurately portray.*

Speaking with Pearson about my impressions, I asked if it was just the bearing tips that make it so much better. His answer was "making the bearing tips 'work' took more effort than you could imagine." He elaborated on how their implementation created many challenges, each one coming close to derailing the whole project. He shared that he almost gave up on it, and I am so thankful



ABOVE My favorite line from Top Gun? "...because I was inverted". *Please note that aerobatics are dangerous, no hang glider is tested or certified for aerobatics, and that I trained and practiced for more than 20 years to be able to do what is seen here.*

BELOW It's really part aircraft and part art—as seen here flying off into the blue yonder at Big Sur.

he did not, as that would have been a real loss for all of hang gliding. The TIII is an evolutionary jump forward (and, by the way, he did say it's not just the bearing tips that make it

what it is).

Earlier, I said this won't be another raving, glowing, stream of compliments. Damn it. Well, OK, this is still a high-performance hang glider, which means it still takes sharper skills than a Falcon or Sport and will be less forgiving of mistakes. As I experienced, you'd better be right-on setting up your approaches. It's comparatively light for a topless glider, but it's still 70 lbs. It's also an intimidating chunk of change. I'd say the value is clear, since this glider is more than twice as enjoyable as my last T2C (which I liked a lot, but now I could never go back, knowing what my flying experience could be!).

Max-performance hang gliders are not for everyone, both in terms of being appropriate and in terms of the best tool for their objective. If you are a current topless hang glider pilot, get a demo on one of these. Please, please, don't take my word for it. I didn't take the word of pilots better than I am, right?! Go into it hoping to hate it as I did! I tell you, firsthand, it makes the awakening all the better. It is a GOOD DAY to be a high-performance hang glider pilot. Now, where's my wallet...? 🇺🇸







Is this the first time someone looped a TIII? Who cares, but it sure was fun! **Photo by Ryan Voight**