

BEFORE YOU BUY YOUR PARACHUTE
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Often when looking for parachute equipment for your aircraft you find what appears to be exactly what you are looking for, but you must act quickly or it may be gone. Unfortunately the seller lives across the country and told you he has several other interested people. If you really want the parachute you need to send a cashier' check or money order immediately. This is where a few horror stories begin. Stop, do not buy anything until it's been inspected, by an FAA certified parachute rigger. If the seller has to have the money right away before allowing you to check out the equipment you should skip the "good deal" and look elsewhere.

After working with parachute equipment full time for over 40 years, I'm confident I can help you find what you need. What no one needs is someone else's white elephant. Sometimes the seller is just as naive about the "brand new, never been used, like new or slightly used" piece of equipment as you are. He thinks it's new because it has never been used and looks good.

For the past 25+ years I've received on the average one of these "good deals" annually that I've had to condemn out as not airworthy. Many other deals worked out in the long run, but some stressful times and hard feelings prevailed. Wondering if your money will ever see your wallet again will give you a few restless nights. This is especially true if you have no one to turn to.

Here are four recent examples that have come through my shop. The first parachute hadn't been packed in several years. The proud new owner brought it to me and when it was opened all the rubber bands had melted onto the lines and parachute material. Then the entire mess was stuck to the inside of the container rendering it useless in an emergency, to the horror of the new owner. Not having this parachute routinely serviced and incorrectly storing it in a humid climate ruined it. Leaving your parachute in the trunk of a hot car over time can achieve the same results.

The next two parachutes also came to me as "good deals". They both had newly constructed harness/containers. When I opened them, the new owners were shocked to discover very old canopies inside. One was so old it survived most of WWII. The other was over 25 years old. Both were sold as being just a few years old. In one case, the previous owner thought the date the harness/container was manufactured was the same as the date the canopy was manufactured. The packing data card that should be with every parachute must include the serial numbers and dates of manufacture of both the canopy and the harness/container. If it's not there be suspicious. With a little prompting on my part the customer received his money back. Sadly, the other person was unable to recover his losses.

Yet another unfortunate incident involved the purchase of a canopy that was not airworthy and a harness/container that was not certified (TSO'd). It was manufactured illegally without FAA approval. You the buyer must beware. A general rule of thumb is if it seems too good of a deal to be true, it probably is.

There is no hard and fast FAA rule as to the service life, in years, for your parachute. The FAA rules basically say that every 180 days your parachute is no longer airworthy and must be recertified. As an FAA certified master rigger and past chairman of the Parachute Industries Rigging Committee I feel you should not have your chute packed after 20 years of age. As a member of the Parachute Industry Association (PIA) I've heard talk among many riggers and all the manufacturers of pilot emergency parachutes and they agree that your parachute should not exceed 20 years service life, regardless of the condition or appearance of your parachute. Throughout the industry, particularly because of the threat of lawsuits, everyone has the tendency to lean towards the conservative side. Now all manufacturers of pilot emergency in the United States do not want their products in service after 20 years.

However, twenty years was not just pulled out of a hat by the manufacturers to sell you more parachutes (the military uses only 10 years for their service life) and many foreign countries use only 15 years. When more accurate fabric pull test equipment became available and better means of doing accelerated testing of nylon for UV exposure it was quite evident that parachutes in excess of 20 years of age more frequently failed the non-destructive 40lb. tensile tests (see PIA, TS-108 for updated pull test requirements) and UV testing. This doesn't mean a 10 year old or a newer parachute is always ok. A lot of factors enter into the picture, such as, where it was stored and its service history. The established guidelines have been implemented to protect you. This 20 year service life is based on ideal conditions. The rigger has no idea where your "good deal" has been. Has it had a tough life?

Has it been left out in the sun (UV damage) or exposed to extreme heat and humidity? Who knows and who can help you? A qualified rigger can inspect your parachute and the cost is usually free. I do not charge people for this service, because after inspecting their chutes quite often they will become a customer. The entire inspection takes only a few minutes and, in my opinion, should be done as a public service.

The final purchase of any parachute, other than brand new, should be contingent upon an FAA certified rigger giving it his or her blessing. Included in their inspection findings should be whether the parachute is airworthy. If it is, how many years service life can be expected out of it, assuming you take proper care of it. Sometimes a parachute with only 5 years service life is a good buy - if it's airworthy and the price is right (cheap). Let's say for example the parachute cost you \$250.00. Divide 5 years into \$250.00 and that breaks down to \$50.00 a year. But, if the same chute was \$750.00 or \$150.00 a year that money (\$750.00) would be better spent towards the purchase of a new piece of equipment that costs now days between \$1800.00 and \$2000.00. A used chute in very good condition should run you about \$50.00- \$70.00 a year for its remaining lifespan, based on 20 years service life and the condition of the parachute. Obviously the worse shape the chute is in (wear and tear) the lower the multiplication factor. This formula can be applied to any parachute to get a rough idea of its value. I feel these are realistic numbers to use and generally take into consideration normal wear and tear. Many

parachutes have had factory Service Bulletins or FAA AD's on them that may or may not have been taken care of. Most pilots would not know about these necessary upgrades and they could be costly, if not factored into the purchase price. That's why I'm here.

A new parachute over the long haul is better for many reasons. It has all the latest safety features on it. You know where it has been and, most importantly, it is cost effective. If you divide \$1800.00 (or what you paid for you new parachute) by 20 (this number represents 20 years service life) the cost to you in this example is \$90.00 a year. An added bonus should you decide to sell your parachute is the higher resale value on the brand name parachutes, on the market today.

My first obligation to you is to make your parachute equipment as safe and reliable as I can. I won't put anything back into service that I wouldn't put on my own back or my sons, who also fly's. I speak from experience having made over 3200+ jumps spanning over 48 years. I'm one of approximately 40 DPRE's (Designated Parachute Rigger Examiners) for the FAA. I'm past chairman of the Rigging Committee for PIA (Parachute Industry Association). This is the world wide organization that represents the parachute industry. I'm the largest dealer of the Softie line of pilot emergency parachute systems, manufactured by Para-Pernalia Inc.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me. All it takes is a phone call (510) 785-7070 Mon.-Thurs. (8:30am – 5pm pst) or you can write to: Silver Parachute Sales & Service, P. O. Box 6092, Hayward, CA 94540-6092. You can also reach me through my website: www.SilverParachutes.com or by email: Allen@SilverParachutes.com .

Thank you and Blue Skies,
Allen Silver