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COLUMNS / ASK ALLEN

Q: Who do you let pack your parachute?

A: I hope it's someone you trust with your life. I want to show you what came through my shop recently. The owner of this parachute had a rigger drive up to their hangar and say that the parachute could be packed right there. Much like the old west snake oil salesman riding into town with a miracle elixir that will cure all ailments.

Let me begin by refreshing your memory about the basic equipment that every parachute rigger must have. Your rigger must have the latest maintenance/packing manual. Every manufacturer I know of has their manuals available online. The manufacturers will send a disk, or hard copy to those of us that still like printed paper. As an owner, you should have received a copy of the maintenance/packing manual with your parachute. If you purchased a used parachute and don't have the manual, use one of the above methods and get one. There is absolutely no excuse, especially for a rigger, for not having a current manual when packing your parachute.

Your rigger should also be able to make new pack closing loops, or get them from the manufacturer. Using closing loops that are out of tolerance can cause the pilot chute to expand and shift. This can cause comfort issues at best and deployment issues at worst (see photo #1). Unfortunately, I get parachutes in my shop that have not had the pack closing loop(s) readjusted or replaced. They also wear out. Closing loops will stretch between pack jobs because they are under a lot of pressure. At every repack they must be readjusted or replaced. They will always be a little out of tolerance when they come in for a repack (1/2 to 3/4 of an inch) but not 2-3 inches like many that I see.

Your rigger should supply the right size rubber bands and elastic keepers for any worn out or missing.

Failure to follow the manufacturers' packing procedures caused this parachute to get a hole in it and \$40 dollars worth of repair to return it to airworthy condition.

First, I noticed that the harness was way out of adjustment. The owner said it had been this way for a long time (see photo #2). Remember, you can fall out of an improperly adjusted harness. You don't want to bailout and see a parachute that looks just like yours falling right along side you. The rigger should've noticed that your parachute was out of adjustment and readjusted the harness according to the size of the individual. Most can also be adjusted to accommodate several different users. The rigger should have also shown the user how to adjust their harness themselves. In most cases it's pretty easy. I've told many people how on the phone. Your chute won't break, but you do want it properly adjusted.

When I opened this parachute, I immediately noticed the canopy protector flaps had not been used. Most manufacturers have some kind of flaps installed to keep the canopy material from getting pinched between the closing grommets that could cause holes in the parachute (see photo #3). This small hole probably wouldn't have caused the parachute to fail, but it must be in an airworthy condition when I sign your packing data card (the official maintenance record for your parachute). Lets go back to photo #1 and you can barely see the dark blue material buried under the parachute. These are the canopy protector flaps. Now lets go to photo #4. This is what should be seen when your parachute is opened for servicing. You can also see the end of the closing loop sticking out of the grommet. When I close the container, the top, bottom and side closing flaps will go over the closing loop and, the final product has the ripcord pin

thru the end of the loop. This is what you see when you open the ripcord protector flap during the preflight inspection of your parachute. You do preflight your parachute before every flight, right?

The canopy protector flaps I'm showing are on a Softie pilot emergency parachute. Every manufacturer's canopy protector flaps may look different, but they all work the same way and are critical in keeping the parachutes from getting damaged. There is no excuse for your rigger not to follow the manufacturers' procedures.

You may be thinking, "How can I tell if my parachute is packed correctly?" When you take your parachute to your rigger, practice pulling the ripcord and then look for all of the stuff mentioned above. Ask questions and become familiar with your parachute just like with your aircraft. If you ship your parachute for repacking, you can still put it on and pull the ripcord. Then exam it yourself for signs of improper packing. If you suspect a problem, take photos. Digital cameras or phones don't waste film and take wonderful photos that can be sent to someone like me to look at. Remember to properly package up your parachute before shipping so it is not damaged in transit. See my website *SilverParachutes.com* for previous articles I've written on this subject. Remember, between repacks you are responsible for keeping your parachute in an airworthy condition.

If you have questions about this article please call or email me at allen@SilverParachutes.com. I would also like any questions that I can use in my column. I promise not to use your name to protect the innocent. Fly safe and I hope you or your flying group will attend one of my bailout safety seminars or consider sponsoring one. Check out my website for past articles (www.SilverParachutes.com).

