



ALLEN SILVER
COLUMNS / ASK ALLEN

Q. I JUST PRACTICED pulling my rip cord. How do I package the spring-loaded pilot chute for shipping?

A: IT'S A GREAT idea to practice pulling your rip cord before sending your parachute for repack and recertification. The challenge is in packaging up that giant jack-in-the-box (aka, pilot chute) that just popped out of your parachute. This was addressed briefly in my April 2007 column, but I want to expand on it (no pun intended). Your shipping box fits the parachute just fine when the pilot chute is compressed, but it's a different story once the rip cord is pulled. Some owners have asked if it's okay just to cram the pilot chute into the box. This is not the best solution since it could bend the spring and ruin the pilot chute. (They are expensive to replace.) You also run the risk of setting a booby trap for your rigger when he or she opens the box. It's a fun prank, but remember that your parachute rigger will always get the last laugh. To quote Charles Plumb, the naval aviator whose story has made its way around the Internet several times, "Remember who packs your parachute!"

There are several ways to package the pilot chute for shipping. One method is to compress it into some plastic bags from the supermarket and tape it shut (see photos 1 and 2). You may require a third hand to help you accomplish this feat, or at least someone to record your attempts on video. You may not get the pilot chute compressed, but you will be a hit on YouTube. Just be careful and protect your face and breakables while you're doing this. If you use tape, be very careful not to get any on the pilot chute material. For that matter, make sure tape doesn't get on any part of your parachute, including the harness. Glue from the tape will damage nylon material over time. You can also close the bags with string or plastic ties, or you can wrap the bridle (the long, 1-inch-wide piece of nylon that attaches the pilot chute to the top of the parachute) around the bag (see photo 3). A similar method is to use a small box in place of the plastic bags.

Some people have even managed to compress the pilot chute back into the open parachute container. Then just close the side flaps of the container back over the pilot chute and tie the container shut with string or rope.

You may decide not to do battle with the pilot chute at all and just get a bigger box, laying the pilot chute on top of the parachute. Be careful because this leaves a lot of empty space in the box and makes it vulnerable to crushing during shipment. This can damage the spring of the pilot chute or even the parachute itself. Never fill the empty space of the box with loose Styrofoam chips. They cause all sorts of problems, not the least of which is aggravating your rigger who will have to spend hours fishing Styrofoam chips out of every nook and cranny of your parachute. If you do use Styrofoam chips, put them into a separate sealed bag first.

All of these methods work well. Whatever you decide to do, be sure not to snag or pinch any of the material. **IAC**



1



2



3