Q: WHY DO I see the risers (main lift webbing) tacked in place on some parachutes?

A: THE MAIN LIFT webbing is that webbing that runs from your waist up to and over your shoulder into the parachute container. The lines of your parachute are attached to the end of the webbing that goes into the container and are referred to as the risers.

Many parachutes come to me for servicing, and they are so far out of adjustment that the person wearing it could have very easily fallen out of her expensive cushion, especially during deployment. If your parachute rigger is doing his job properly, your parachute should leave his shop properly adjusted for your height and weight. If your parachute is adjustable (some are not), the three-bar slide should be in the small of your shoulder just below the clavicle. Constantly putting your parachute on and taking it off can cause the webbing to slip through the adjusters. If your parachute seems to be always falling off one or both shoulders, consider giving your rigger a call. You might also try asking your fellow International Aerobatic Club pilots, the owner of the fixed-base operation you fly out of, or even your Ouija board for advice, but please do something. Falling out of your harness during a bailout is not an option. Once you've bailed out of your aircraft, there is no turning back.

If your parachute rigger is not nearby and you think the advice your peers have given you is questionable, take pictures of the problem area and e-mail them, as well as your height and weight, to your rigger. You can also e-mail me the pictures along with a current photo of you (to help determine how your parachute should be adjusted) and your contact number. I'm more than happy to look at the problem and get right back to you with fitting advice.

This is the reason I often tack the risers in place, especially if you're the only one wearing the chute (see Photo 1). Photo 1 shows me pointing to the tacking just above the rectangular piece called a three-bar slide. This will eliminate the problem. If you have multiple users of the same parachute, I strongly urge you to become familiar with the various adjustments on that parachute. This is especially helpful if you operate a flight school where customers of all shapes and sizes wear your parachutes. I often tack the risers in place for a flight school that has multiple users of a parachute, *but I show them how to size it down for smaller users* (see Photo 2). Photo 2 shows how I shorten the harness from the waist to the shoulder area and leave a loop just above the three-bar slide. After the flight, the parachute can easily be returned to where it was before by sliding the excess webbing back through the three-bar slide. When a flight school receives its parachute(s) back from me with the risers tacked (hand sewn) in place, they'll generally fit someone who is about 5 feet 5 inches to 6 feet 1 inch without a problem. I'd rather see someone wearing a parachute that's a little tight on her rather than too loose. Falling out of an improperly adjusted harness is a real possibility that should be addressed before you put the parachute on. Lengthening the main lift webbing for a tall person is more difficult and, once lengthened, can be difficult, if not impossible, to return to the original adjustment without the help of your rigger. IAC