



# ASK Allen

*A master rigger answers your questions about parachutes*

Allen Silver is a master rigger and has been taking care of aerobatic and glider pilots since 1972. Allen has agreed to pass along his knowledge to *Sport Aerobatics* readers. Here are two of the recent questions we have received regarding parachutes.

**Q:** Hey Allen, how do I select a parachute that fits me **and** my aircraft?

**A:** You're putting the cart before the horse if you choose an aerobatic aircraft without first considering what kind of a parachute will fit in the cockpit with you. At 5 feet 5 inches tall, I can fit into almost any aircraft comfortably and take my pick of parachutes. However, some of my customers aren't so lucky. I always tell them they should consider a back-style parachute before a seat-pack type. Even though both styles may have the same size parachute, it's much easier to get into and out of an aircraft wearing the back style, especially during an emergency. The back-style chute is generally more comfortable because the load is distributed over your entire back. Imagine pulling 5g's while wearing a 15 to 20-pound seat pack. You might as well have a cement sack tied to your bottom! However, in some airplanes you may have no

room behind you, and you will need a seat pack. Generally it puts about 3-4 inches underneath you and about a 1/2 inch behind. On some seat packs you can add a cushion to the part you sit on. Seat packs are especially good for cross-country flights. However, just because you fly a Stearman with a bucket seat doesn't mean you're locked into a seat pack. Many pilots fill the bucket portion of their seat pan with a comfortable cushion and use a back pack. If you do this, be careful not to fill the seat under you with foam so soft it will compress to nothing when you pull back hard on the stick!

**Q:** How do I choose the correct size parachute for me?

**A:** I encourage you to read three articles I've had published over the past few years. The first is titled "All Parachutes Are Not Created Equal." The second one is titled "Is Your Life Worth \$70.00 A Year?" (Both are available free at [www.SilverParachutes.com](http://www.SilverParachutes.com).) The last article is titled "What Difference Does It Make What Parachute I Wear?" (May 2002 *Sport Aerobatics*). These articles explain the criteria that will help you to select the best parachute. Focus on having the parachute that will deliver

the slowest rate of descent possible—and that doesn't necessarily mean a larger parachute!

Sometimes the choices are limited due to space or the size of the pilot. Sometimes you'll have to compromise the size of the parachute so you can fit into your aircraft and still fly aerobatics. If you ever have to bail out, I'd rather have you come down a little faster and maybe be injured, than have no choice but to ride an out-of-control aircraft.

All modern parachutes are placarded with their ratings and go through a series of drop tests. Three of these tests have to be done on the same parachute with no repairs in between drops at 1.2 times the limitations the manufacturer wants to include on the placard. For example, if a manufacturer wants a parachute placarded at 150 knots indicated airspeed (KIAS) with up to a maximum load of 220 pounds, then the chute will need to pass the drop test at 180 KIAS with 264 pounds. Modern parachutes have a built-in safety factor that should give you confidence in their performance, but I'm not advising you to push the envelope.

*Allen Silver is the owner of Silver Parachute Sales. Send your questions to [Allen@silverparachutes.com](mailto:Allen@silverparachutes.com).*

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