



Dusting off the cobwebs

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE A LIFE OTHER than flying, it may be time to start thinking about putting away the skis or returning from your winter home in some warm exotic place. Flying season will soon be here for all you fair-weather pilots. So now is the time to start thinking about dusting the cobwebs off your parachute and aircraft and changing the oil (not on your parachute).

Now is also the time to start thinking about your emergency procedures. This applies not just to your bailout procedures, but all your emergency procedures. In my experience most emergencies that come up could be avoided with proper preventive procedures. The one I specialize in is bailout training and the use of survival equipment like your Nomex flying clothing and your helmet. How about organizing or attending a bailout/survival equipment seminar in your area? I have many openings still available. Can your IAC, EAA, XYZ (or other lettered organization) afford a seminar from me or someone else in your area? If not, I have a webinar on the EAA website that is free and goes down quite well with a nice glass of wine or a cold beer. Go to www.SilverParachutes.com and click on the link (about halfway down my home page).

Now is a good time for me to discuss some of the ongoing problems popping up that could affect your safety. I'm constantly receiving parachutes, especially from new customers, that are so far out of adjustment that during a bailout you and your parachute may become separated, kind of like an ugly divorce. My customers, for the most part, have found it much easier to keep their parachutes adjusted properly, with a little training, than having me haranguing them about it when their parachute comes in for inspection and re-certification. I'm always glad to hear from you and can explain how to properly don your parachute and adjust it. All you need to do is call or e-mail me.

What I'm worried about are my new customers and people new to aerobatics who have had no firsthand training on the ins and outs of their parachute. In a perfect world I would like to see everyone return their parachute(s) to the factory or to a factory representative at least once every few years to make sure their expensive cushion has been receiving the tender loving care it deserves from you



or your rigger. Also, there are many riggers who are not as familiar with pilot emergency parachutes as they should be.

Has your rigger spent time with you and answered all your questions about your parachute? It does me no good to pack your parachute if you do not know how to properly adjust, wear, and use it.

A while back I had two new customers fly to my airport and pick up their new parachutes. I spent over an hour with them until I felt confident they had an excellent chance of survival in case an emergency egress was needed. In addition, they left with my bailout seminar handout material. It goes without saying a lot of war stories were exchanged, with the understanding that they could call or e-mail me anytime with questions. That also goes for you who are not my customers. I'm very specialized and have serviced only pilot emergency parachutes in my shop for more than 30 years.

I've had many articles published over the years addressing many of the issues you might like to know more about, such as how to properly take care of your parachute, putting it on, and of course how to pull that shiny silver rip cord handle properly. I may sound like a broken record, or is it now a broken CD, but I constantly receive parachutes in my shop that are in need of a generous helping of TLC. Having your parachute packed every once in a while at the closest place may be cost-effective and may save you time, but will it save your life in an emergency? There are areas where you can save, but not getting proper parachute care is not one of them. You need to make sure your rigger is tending to you and your expensive cushion properly.

Let me first start off with proper adjustment and fit. Put your parachute on and tighten the straps as you normally would, but remain standing. You should not be able to lift up the portion of the harness that goes over your shoulders by more than about an inch. You need to make sure your parachute stays with you when it's deploying. Does your parachute (see photo) look like this? If yes, you need to have your rigger adjust it right away before you go flying again. If you ship your parachute to your rigger, call and give your height and weight, and maybe send a photo with it or e-mail one so your rigger can better understand what's going on. Many riggers, like myself, hand tack the webbing in place after adjusting it so it does not slip between repacks. In an emergency bailout if your parachute is out of adjustment, the chest strap, if you have one, could also cause serious injury to your neck and/or face. For more information about this read the account of Kirill Barsukov titled "Mid Air Collision" in the February 2012 issue of Sport Aerobatics.

Now, if you're literally still with me I'd like to discuss two other items that keep appearing in my shop. Checking the length of the pack closing loop(s) and the condition of the rubber bands. I've harped on these two issues several times before. First let's go over the rubber bands. Does your rigger have replacement rubber bands? They don't last forever and need replacing from time to time. These rubber bands hold your lines in place and help to properly sequence the opening of your parachute. If your rubber bands are rotted and/or weak, your suspension lines could easily fall out of them. This can cause an out-of-sequence opening. You and/or your deploying parachute could become entangled. If you ship your parachute to your rigger, you can check the rubber bands yourself by donning your parachute and practice pulling the rip cord and inspecting them. Make sure you keep your parachute and especially the suspension lines away from the scratchy part of any Velcro tape. Now locate the rubber bands. If you pull up on them and they are pitted, sticky to the touch, or very weak when you pull on them, they need to

be replaced. I probably go through 5-10 pounds of rubber bands a year. However, they can easily last for many repacks if you properly store your parachute. Keep in mind they will deteriorate a lot faster if you live in a hot and humid climate or store your parachute in a hot place like the trunk of your car.

Since you now have your container open, check the length and condition of the closing loop(s) that the rip cord pins go through. They are what hold the container closed. The specs are in your owner's manual. The closing loops will always stretch between repacks and must be either shortened back to factory specs or replaced if worn. If they haven't been checked and replaced in a long time, they will usually be at least one or more inches out of tolerance. The closing loops keep your spring-loaded pilot chute properly centered and compressed so it can launch far away from you when you pull the rip cord. It also keeps your rip cord pins from coming out. Those loops must be properly adjusted. You don't want your parachute accidentally deploying on the ramp to the amusement of your fellow pilots.

Now that winter is almost over I hope to see you at Sun 'n Fun. My bailout seminar is scheduled for April 4 at 11 a.m. in the Central Florida Aerospace Academy Building.

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