Ask Allen

This article falls under the category “You’ve got to be kidding”. I write articles particularly concerning the use of parachutes and related equipment. Recently it was brought to my attention a couple of You Tube videos showing 4-year old’s doing aerobatics with their fathers. One I believe was in Canada (by the flag patch on the shoulder of dad’s flight suit) and the other was in the US. Both showed the 4-year old’s giggling and laughing while their dads put them thru aerobatics.

I’m sure you can easily find them. All I did was google 4-year old’s doing aerobatics.

What’s appalling to me is the disregard for their safety. One had a parachute on and the other child did not. It wouldn’t have made a difference anyway. If something catastrophic happened neither child would have survived. The one with the parachute on would have fallen out of the harness anyway. They are built for adults, not young children.

That’s just part of the problem. The one with the parachute on would not have been able to pull the ripcord anyway. Before you go off and tell me I have no business telling parents what to do I’ll explain a couple of the “many” times I’ve had parents call asking me for a parachute to fit their young child. I explain to them the ramifications on what they are trying to do and almost all have said things like “They would unfasten their seatbelts, jettison the canopy or door and reach back to assist their child. Those are some of the dumbest statements I’ve heard. I try and tell them they would not be able to do this while their aircraft, or what’s left of it, is tumbling out of control pulling 4 or 5 g’s. They still argue they could do it. Before I hang up I tell them they are signing their child’s death warrant. They just don’t get it. I call this the little league mentality. My child can do anything better than yours.

My own son wanted to do aerobatics at an early age and I resoundly said NO. Not until the parachute fits you properly and you’re old enough to pull your own ripcord and understand the possibilities of what could happen. Being in a position as a rigger I had him pull the ripcord several times until I was sure he would have no problem. Then when he was old enough I sought out the best pilot I knew and he went up and did a spin, loop and roll, while I sat on the ground worrying.

Pilot emergency parachutes are designed for adults who understand this is their last chance at surviving and are willing to take the risks. The risks are few and the rewards are many, but the risks are still there.

The ripcord pull must not exceed 22 lbs. This may not seem like a lot, but the parachutes I represent typically have pulls around 10-12 lbs. and I have many adults (men and women) with very little upper body strength who cannot pull the ripcord let alone remove it from the pocket where it’s Velcroed in. And, you think your young child would fare better?

Are you only interested in showing your buddies Go-Pro pictures of how cute you think this is? I have seen videos of pilots and skydivers filming their own accidents that are very painful to watch.

I hope this message will get across to the few parents who think this is acceptable. Those of you who witness or hear of this need to step forward and say something. This is not acceptable and put a stop to it before more new rules are made by some government officials to protect us from ourselves.

If you wear a parachute you should not wonder what it’s like to pull the ripcord on your parachute. Make it a part of the repack cycle. Take the time to visit your rigger and have them run you through a practice drill that finishes with you pulling the ripcord. If you’re too far away from your rigger and ship it to them you can still practice pulling the ripcord. You can call them and they may be able to walk you through pulling the ripcord while you’re on speaker phone.

**You can always call me** and I’ll be more than happy to assist you. It’s not just about pulling the ripcord. Is your parachute harness adjusted properly for your size? Are you putting in on properly? I have many articles that are on my website that will be of value. Take the time to review some of them. We all need continuing education. One day it may prove valuable as you struggle to get out of your disabled aircraft. I’ve had people survive bailouts who had less than a second to live. They did their homework and knew what to do and **NEVER** gave up. After all, what do you have to lose?

The best thing you can do is have someone who is very familiar with pilot emergency parachutes give your group a seminar. Is it free, not always. But, it’s information you need to make quick decisions and survive in case the unimaginable happens to you and not the other person. I’ve been invited to give my power point presentation as far away as Australia and all over the US. Consider a presentation before it’s too late and all you can say is “We should have”. My seminars are always free. Only my travel expenses need to be covered. You can go to my website <silverparachutes.com> for details and maybe read an article or two of mine that have been published. I’ve been told they go down well with a glass of wine or a cold beer. Just as important you can call me anytime if you have questions and concerns. There is no such thing as a dumb question. When I sell a parachute to a new customer I spend whatever time it takes to make sure they know how to use their parachute. If I don’t you might as well call it nothing more than an “Expensive Cushion”.