

Bridge Day 1997

Pilot Chute Stowage for BASE

10 years ago the subject of pilot chute stowage for BASE jumping was a non-issue. Common knowledge dictated that we hand hold the pilot chute to help eliminate total malfunctions and speed the pilot chute inflation.

Today things are different. Hand holding of pilot chutes is still the preferred method for beginners and low altitude jumps. However, increasing numbers of jumpers are choosing to “go stowed” on most if not all their jumps. Going stowed is becoming perceived as a demonstration of experience or skill. This is causing a scenario similar to one that occurred with pull-out deployment systems in skydiving. Years ago, the British Parachute Association declared that due to the less “user friendly” operation of the pull-out vs. throw-out deployment method, jumpers in the UK couldn’t use this system unless they had a minimum of 200 jumps. Well, to avoid looking like a novice, at 200 jumps it was routine to switch to a pull-out. The trouble was that (in this author’s opinion) the pull-out is less user friendly, and as a result, incidents and accidents directly related to pull-outs increased.

Although incredibly reliable, a pilot chute can malfunction. Hand holding a pilot chute will not eliminate all potential malfunctions, but going stowed introduces additional potential for problems. For example: A pilot chute handle can be temporarily lost, shoved into its pocket or covered by flapping clothes. Improper packing of the stowed pilot chute can lead to extraction problems such as hard pulls, or being forced to extract the entire centerline before the mesh.

There are many good sources for information regarding how best to hand hold or stow a pilot chute; As well as deciding what size pilot chute to use. Consolidated Rigging, Inc. includes demonstrations on packing and deploying pilot chutes of various sizes in the video owner’s manuals that accompany our Mojo canopies and Perigee series of BASE containers. Any qualified manufacturer should also have advice or literature on the subject. The important thing is that you understand your options and make an informed decision when you decide how it is that you will begin your deployment sequence. If your pilot chute fails to work properly, your whole day will rapidly deteriorate.

Remember, there is a place for going stowed and a place for hand holding. It is good to be comfortable with both methods and know how and when to use them.

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