

feel the strings

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THE ANOMOLY OF THE CURVE

The Learning Curve

You may already understand the concept of "The Learning Curve." You might be at the bottom staring skyward wondering how far you might go. Or you may be looking down from the top in disbelief that you are a long way from the bottom. Undoubtedly you are enjoying the journey.

One could argue that the shape of the curve has already been scribed by the hard lessons already learned by the old school in the last 200 years of jumping. Your journey along the curve has already begun, what remains is dependent upon your thoughts and actions. If you slow down and take the time to look at the shape of your curve then you'll probably appreciate what lies ahead.

The Shape of the Curve

There are many dependant and independent variables that you may choose from to label the axis of the curve. Consider the following factors:

- May describe the path of someone in a hurry to make it further, faster through the learning process.
- The 'slow is smooth and smooth is fast' approach, described by a steady, gradual increase.
- The uncurrent skydiver, oscillating with no real pattern nor progression of learning.
- Draw your own curve.

Experience versus choice of parachute. Experience may be described as time in the air, time in the sport, time under your wing. It may also describe the number of times you have seen accidents happen, or the number of times you have had an accident to name just a few. You choose your parachute.

Experience versus luck. Can best be drawn as two buckets. One empty with experience emblazoned on the outside and the other is filled by luck. The trick is to fill the bucket with experience before you empty the bucket of luck.

Knowledge Versus Sense. You may have gathered as much knowledge as possible and learned about your mistakes, yet if you don't apply a significant amount of common sense then a lot of learning will be in vain.

Somewhere along the line currency, previous experience and present skill level all need to be factored into the complex equation. As you can tell, the shape of the curve may be moulded by many complex factors. At first there seems to be no simple way to make your way safely up the curve.

The Bullet Proof Stage

As a child, did you ever sit atop the hills hoist, a great big S painted on your shirt, bright red cape draped behind you, ready to take on the world? Nothing can hurt you because you are 'Bullet Proof'.

Arguably this stage might start at any given jump number, any day, week or year of your life. The shape of the curve at this stage is normally quite steep and getting exponentially steeper. You may not realise that you are running faster than necessary at this point in time. Running to go where? Running past a lot of necessary challenges relentlessly looking for a faster way to the top. The journey through this stage is arduous and might last your lifetime, if you live that long. The greyness in this stage is obvious to others on other stages of the curve, though may not be so obvious to you.

Many people that are in this stage believe they are ready to downsize canopies after only a couple of hundred jumps. They may not have jumped in many different seasons and conditions. They probably do not spend enough time under their wing practicing new and old techniques. They don't listen the first time. They're too busy runnin' with only a notion of the answer to the questions that they should be stopping to ask. Suddenly one day after a close call or a crash you realise the S isn't for superman, it's for STUPID. No-one is bullet proof.

The Glitch (*The anomaly of the Curve*)

When the old school learned to skydive they may have had to hook in their X228 at 150ft or so to get the maximum 'swoop' out of their parachute. Today, the same effect may be achieved from turning significantly higher (600-900ft) on an elliptical canopy. So the anomaly evolves to: *Do I stay on the parachute that I have and continually risk more because I am turning lower to the ground? Or do I buy a new parachute designed to allow me to turn higher, dive longer and attain longer swoops?*

Some parachutes are not built to do the things that you may want them to do. Carving a Sabre for example is a difficult objective. Some people may believe they are carving because they are continually turning before touching down. Without the correct technique to gain sufficient speed to maintain more than trim speed throughout the carve then you are unlikely to be able to maintain it without sacrificing lift. Consequently your descent rate will increase as you are turning, your forward speed will decrease and the result will be a not so pleasant and awkward landing.

Sometimes the most basic skills are forgotten because your focus is solely on the new skill. Such skills include allowing for at least three seconds of recovery time after your final input before touchdown, landing with your wing above your head, minimise converging flight paths on the final glide stage of the circuit to avoid each other's burble and the risk of collision. Arguably the development of freefall skills outweighs the growth of parachute skills. The solution to the glitch is not to buy a new parachute so that you can begin to learn new skills. The secret is to master old skills to a point where you can perform all of your acquired skills in many variations of conditions. The best canopy pilots in this country and the world will tell you that this will take at the very least 600-1,000 jumps. So why try to take short cuts? There are no corners of the curve to cut.

Where should I land when I fall off the Curve?

Everyone wants to land 'out the front', right where you want to. In reality you can land anywhere and not necessarily in the same area. The entire world is your drop zone. Land where you can, not where you want. Instead of arriving where you end up, land where and how you need to land safely. Never fly past a safe landing opportunity only to scrape back to the DZ landing field. Fly as predictably as possible, so that others around you, may be able to read your pattern and land safely flying a similar safe path. (Thanks Newy)

So don't run, enjoy the journey, stop every-now and again, smell the roses, enjoy where you are. Consolidate what you know. How can I make it further up the curve? It is very easy. You just have to know that the curve is infinite. Work on your next small step.

