

feel the strings

BY ROB MC MILLAN

Old Dogs and New Tricks

Old Dog. /dog/, n., v., -n. 1. A hairy old Alsatian x Collie that can barely walk to its water bowl? -n. 2. A clapped out old X228 that you would only consider using as a car cover? -n. 3. A crusty looking skydiver that has been jumpin' since the sixties who swears that a Paracommander was the best canopy ever constructed? 4. An old pilot that has been 'round the traps'.

One such old dog is Bob Hoover, an American pilot of fifty years considered by many, including Chuck Yeager, to be the best pilot flying today, *'the pilots pilot.'* He has served in WWII, flown over 300 types of aircraft and regularly performed at air shows demonstrating old and new tricks. The U.S. FAA suspended the Old Dog's licence almost 10 years ago, citing that he was medically unfit to pilot an aircraft. However he can still fly in other continents of the world as he can still pass their medical examinations. Chuck Yeager wrote,

"The key to Bob's capability was his preparation. Bob never tried any manoeuvre that he hadn't practiced over and over. He never expected a plane to do more than it was capable of, but he stretched the damn envelope as far as possible. He's very disciplined and never flies in a dangerous manner."

Other test pilots respected Bob because he could fly an airplane right on the feathered edge.

"Bob is also a true perfectionist. If there's a risk involved, he knows it's a calculated one before he ever attempts those aerobatic routines that have made him famous."

One such manoeuvre is a 16-point roll from ground level with both engines off, in a Shrike Commander that was designed to carry corporate executives. After completing his aerobatics feats, he would land and then taxi up to the show's announcer un-powered and without the use of his brakes, a classic demonstration of energy management.

New Tricks /nju trik/, adj, n.1. Something that an Old Dog can teach you. -n.2. The art or knack of doing something new. 3. Performing a clever or dexterous feat, as for exhibition or entertainment. -v.

1. Energy Conservation

Have you ever felt like you have run out of energy before you reach the ground? Is the intensity of freefall stealing all of your energy? Does your canopy require a lot of energy to deal with its toggle and riser pressure?

Save your energy and strength for landing by flying longer circuits, ie. plan for lesser turns to fly on your descent. Try some harness turns (weight shift) and rest your arms. Work on improving your strength and general fitness. You may begin to enjoy your landings more when you have sufficient physical strength to execute a safe landing.

You should also conserve your mental energy for landing, you should be making smart decisions about your landing options well before you need to. Try to avoid using violent aggressive toggle maneuvers. Avoid getting dizzy by not spiraling down for long periods. If you still feel like you are landing a Cessna with only a nose-wheel then maybe you need to learn to relax your

mind a little more? Ask yourself a few questions: Do you practice the techniques that you use to land when you fly? Do you recite a landing sequence to yourself well before your approach? Do you flare too quickly or not enough? Are your brake lines too short and do you over flare and stall your canopy. Do you keep looking where you need to fly?

It is only when you start to ask the right questions that that you can begin to strategically imagine a smarter solution to your landing problem. (Thanks Smiff).

2. Do As We Say Don't Do As We Do

Old Dogs should lead by example and demonstrate safe and disciplined technique. Otherwise there may not be anymore Old Dogs left in the future. Being old, it is easy to forget that a lot of jumpers resemble Lyre birds - they love to mimic and they enjoy short, intense flights. That of course is not to say that Old Dogs can do things and get away with them simply because we believe we know what we are doing. It is simply because we have been stupid enough to practice new tricks repeatedly. Old Dogs were young dogs once, and it took them a long time to learn their repertoire of tricks.

3. Showing Off

Old Dogs don't become old dogs simply by flying the aircraft that they do. Rather it is the preparation, dedication and commitment that they put into their craft that entitle them to their vintage. They fly well, using their craft, not because of their craft. When they need to perform a new trick, they never try it first in front of an audience. They have already dirt dived it a few times before jumping through 'The Flaming Hoop of Death' at the Pal Dog Olympics. Old Dogs always figure out where and how they have to land well before they are actually doing it.

Hoover is classically remembered for his quote that you should:

"Keep flying all the way to the end of the crash. Never stop flying."

Wise words from an Old Dog I reckon, I'm sure that he has had a few crashes in his time and I'm sure that is why the Old Dog is still learning new tricks. (Thanks Mr Hoover)

Can you teach an Old Dog (parachute) a new trick?

Flying an Old Dog is hard work. It takes a lot more energy to get a better response from the canopy and the timing of your flare becomes more critical. Canopies have lifetimes, arguably it may be around 1000-1300 jumps for an F-111 and 2000-2500 jumps for a ZP canopy. If your canopy is at this stage then it may be worth investing in something newer. Old Dogs need to retire at some stage.

A new trick that I learned at the Nationals:

Gum Tree /gum tri/ n., When the 100ft gum tree looks like it is waving at you, stand on the ground and wave back. (Thanks Ray).



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