

feelings

BY ROB MC MILLAN

It was great to see that time was spent constructively planning for our sports future at the APF Conference. One notable topic of discussion regarded the culture of skydiving. Most seemed to agree that the culture of skydiving needs to change with the times and now is the best time for it to do so.

CULTURAL CHANGE

If you mooned a complete stranger as he was leaving for overseas for a long period, then you would be labelled as rude and indecent. If however you moon a skydiver, he would likely consider it to be a great honour (just as we all salute the boogie aircraft as it leaves the DZ after a long week of jumping). This is just one example of how we define our culture. Within the skydiving community there has always been a unique culture. We behave in many ways that most of the general community cannot even begin to understand. We value our time in jump tickets, often trying to jump more than we earn.

As our sport evolves, so does the equipment and teaching methods. At present it appears that the parachute technology has outgrown our knowledge and skill level. For example, ten years ago when Stiletto canopies were first introduced to the market place, you had to have between 500 and 1000 jumps to even consider flying one. These days, B and C license jumpers are flying them. To make life even harder sometimes they are using old canopies that are close to wearing out. Such canopies require more speed and better than average canopy skills to fly them effectively and safely. Granted our sport would never evolve unless we begin to forge new boundaries and create new limits, though do you really want to become part of the other end of the food chain and not survive because you are not the fittest?

Our culture should not suggest that jumpers are 'Cooler' or could have more fun if they have a pocket rocket to fly around. Our culture should reflect that we are parachute pilots who fly highly tuned inflatable wings, not just parachutists that deploy a deceleration device. Today's rockets can be considered as acceleration devices as some may dive faster than you can fall on your belly. Fundamentally, our culture should reflect why we do what we do, to learn, to have fun and to live till the next day. You can be a part of the cultural shift by encouraging your fellow jumpers to seek and filter advice from the appropriate people. If they don't exist in your local area then look farther afield. Look after one another, be proactive and get back to mastering the basics at a grass roots level. To ensure your survival it is critical that you select an appropriate wing.

CANOPY CHOICE

It would be silly to put an Albatross's wings on a Sparrow. It would be catastrophically suicidal to put a Sparrow's wings on an Albatross. Evolution won't choose a wing for you, though it may eliminate the unfit. (Thanks Jimmy Smith).

Choosing the right set of equipment is the most important choice you can make as a parachute pilot. Realistically, flying a parachute represents a lot of the total risk.

Surviving is about matching your canopy type and size to your ability and then wing loading and NOT vice versa.

$$\text{Best Canopy, Smartest Choice} = \frac{\text{ABILITY}}{\text{Wing loading}}$$

Ability may be hard to measure, though a smart pilot will recognise their deficiencies and seek advice to help them improve before flying a new wing. There are a few important elements that you should consider before making a choice to fly a different wing.

Consistency and Competency - The only way to be consistent is to practice, the right way, with precision and discipline. Practice takes time and lots of it, and there is no easy substitute. To be considered competent and consistent on a particular canopy, many experienced pilots will inform you that it will likely take more than 500 jumps, perhaps even as many as a thousand. Aside from this you should realise that different skills need to be mastered before trying to learn them on a new canopy. Jump numbers does not dictate your skill level. It is indicative of how many landings you have, though it is no real reflection on how well you can fly.

Carelessness - If you are feeling rushed, tired, over excited or un-current, to name only a few, then you may easily become careless. The less time that you spend under your wing, the less time you have to plan and carelessness may strike again. Simply by choosing a canopy that you are not ready to jump you are being careless. So don't go there!

When you finally do decide to change wings, be very wary that your old habits may hinder your performance. The wheel has now turned full circle, and you are back on the starting line with a long way to go.

CHECKLISTS

Chris Lynch likes to teach an AAD check whilst under canopy. Before attempting anything under canopy you should check your **Airspace**, **Altitude** and **Drop zone**. An **Airspace** check ensures that you have enough room to perform a manoeuvre. Obviously you should only perform an action when you have sufficient **Altitude**. Further if you are unlikely to make it to the **Drop Zone** then you shouldn't be practicing new techniques. Whilst taking this into account you should still be working on fitting in to the landing and approach pattern at the appropriate height.

A novice pilot may opt to think *Full Glide* (hands up for maximum trim speed), *Legs together* (ready for a PLR), *Look* (where you want to fly) and *Smooth flare*, whilst turning from your base leg to your final approach. The idea is to make checklists as simple and as easy to recall as possible. What other checklists can you come up with? Ask your peers and instructors, determine what works best for you.

Thank you to those members who have returned surveys regarding ASM. There is some constructive criticism among the replies and suggestions regarding future articles. So look forward to articles on CRW, in-flight skills exercises and interviews with some of Australia's top pilots.

Rob McMillan
self portrait



FLY SMOOTH SAFE JUMPING