

From The Downwind Rigging Loft

#1

10 February 2006

What's In A Repack & Skills Camps

Disclaimer (or what-ever) – over the last weekend a group of guys from Ohio came to CSS to jump. The jumper mentioned in the newsletter below, Brett, is a good dude who got taken advantage of and is lucky to be alive. I am not trying to embarrass him in any way but wish to use his experience so we can all learn.

What's in a repack

This last weekend a jumper visiting from Ohio asked me to do a rush repack on his 23 year old rig with 20 year old round reserve. *(Personal note: many riggers will not work on rigs over 20 years old. I have struggled with this myself as I have seen 30 year old rigs in better shape than 10 year old rigs. Basically, the older the rig, the more critical my judgement. Webbing degrades with age, however, if well stored and maintained, there is no reason, in my mind, for older gear not to be considered airworthy. Most of the older rigs I have worked on come from people who care for their gear and do not jump a lot. The deciding factor in any rig I repack is whether or not I would jump the rig and intentionally use the reserve. If I would not, then I will not work on the rig. This is the policy I use when inspecting gear and as you will see pertains to what you will read below.)* My initial inspection revealed a great deal of work needed to be done on the rig, all of which I could and would willingly do before I would jump it. The work needed just involved replacing some grommets, plastic stiffeners and Velcro, no big deal. To my horror however I discovered that the leg strap friction adapter on the right side was on upside down and looked as though it had been for the entire 23 years the rig had been in service. I immediately grounded the rig and informed the owner. Truth be told, I would have refused the work anyway, despite the friction adapter. After talking to him I found he had only 250 jumps and was using the rig for Birdman jumps. All the necessary work needed on the rig would have to be done before I took it myself on a solo belly jump, but to use it on a Birdman jump with its special considerations is not, in my mind wise. Additionally, a round reserve, on a new jumper, in a day and age when we no longer teach how to fly rounds, the average jumper does not practice PLFs, we do not spot the aircraft for rounds as in the old days and he was not familiar with the DZ and surroundings, well,,,,,,let's see,,,,,,how many disaster/incident report scenarios can we come up with. I offered him a good deal on one of the store rental rigs and hooked him up with Eric Miller, a more experienced wingsuit flyer and everyone went home happy and alive.

We have packed many round reserves in sport and pilot rigs including some over 20 years old, I have also grounded several that were less than 20 years old. We

have however refused to pack an airworthy round reserve because the person using it had no business having a round reserve. Look at some of the veteran jumpers at CSS that have ram air reserves in their rigs: Don Carrington, Larry Strayhorn, Pete Luter, Randy Garmen, Dan Winkelstein. I believe all these guys started in the days of the round and have several round jumps to their credit. I guesstimate the total years of experience of those mentioned is over 100 years and thousands of jumps. If they aren't using rounds, there is probably a reason for this.

The jumper involved in this incident, Brett, was in my mind taken advantage of by someone trying to sell an old, crappy un-airworthy rig to an eager young jumper looking for affordable gear. Additionally, the fact that the issues with this rig were not addressed during previous I&Rs greatly disturbs me. The other issues included Velcro that needed replacement (not a big deal), a fully exposed main closing loop anchor tap grommet that faces the main container and can easily snag a suspension line, a bottom main flap grommet that needed replacement and was a major snag point for lines, a top main flap stiffener that had fully exposed corners, again a major snag hazard, and finally, side main flaps that could potentially and easily result in a main suspension line half-hitching around it.

The following is the moral of the story:

When you pay \$45 for a 120 day repack you are not paying to have your reserve repacked. You are paying for an airworthiness inspection of the complete harness container system and reserve. I am often asked by people to give the rig a look over while I do the repack and I respond with the above. During the 120 days the bulk of the wear and abuse is on the rig, not the reserve. The harness, grommets, stiffeners etc etc etc get worn and often need work or replacement. Much of this we can do in our loft. There is usually an additional charge but we try to keep it reasonable. Never Never Never Ever let anyone do a repack without a complete harness container and aad inspection. That is what you are really paying for. The reserve is also inspected as part of the process and then, of course, needs to get repacked very carefully. The term "reserve repack" is used because it is a lot easier to say than "120 day airworthiness inspection in accordance with applicable FARs".

The main is not a part of this process but we will gladly inspect it as well if you request. Everyone should be in the habit of inspecting their own gear anyway. The great thing about skydiving equipment is that when it looks broke, it usually is.

Finally, the above incident really disturbs me. This is twice we have found this kind of hardware problem on rigs that have been missed several times during repacks by very experienced riggers. I make no claim to being perfect and am a highly flawed human being as are all of you (well, with the exception of a few

people in their own minds). This rig has been used like this for 23 years, as well as the other problems stated above. Some people will not work on gear over 20 years old. I will on occasion if the rig is something I would jump. I have seen 30 year old rigs in better shape than 10 year old rigs (I have one in the loft right now) In my opinion, a sense of perspective needs to be used. And in this sense I say the following; What's the sense in pulling out a reserve, repacking it and ignoring a dozen other things that can go wrong. Many people ask my opinion as to the need to change to 180 days as opposed to 120 days and why repacks cost what they do. I wonder if they are as concerned about the cost when they are reaching for handles.

As always, just my opinion, and I invite other informed opinions, especially from the many people more experienced than I.

Skills Camps.

Due to personal issues, aircraft problems, staffing concerns, weather, Martians, Randy Hamberleins late obsession with sheep ranchers, and general all around laziness, I have not scheduled any skills camps. Several people have expressed a desire for me to get off my slack ass. Sorry, guess I need to spend more time at work. I am working toward establishing a last Sunday in each month schedule starting with Sunday 26 February, 2006. I am also going to try to get some going for the weekdays with Wednesday in mind. I will strive to get a more permanent schedule out as soon as possible.

Hey Randy H., ,,,, Baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa

As always, just my opinion, what the hell do I know.

JHL
Downwind NC

Postscript – pictures of the rig are attached to this email, they are not very good pictures but I hope you can see what I mean.