



BREAK-OFF ON FREELY SKYDIVES HAS BEEN A HOT TOPIC RECENTLY WITH THE INCREASE OF THE OPENING HEIGHT FOR A AND B LICENCE JUMPERS AND A COUPLE OF WELL-PUBLICISED AAD ACTIVATIONS. THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO TEACH A GOOD PRACTICE SIT-FLY BREAK-OFF PROCEDURE WHICH CAN BE USED AS A REFRESHER FOR THOSE ALREADY IN THE KNOW

FF BREAK-OFF

The first area we are going to look at is ancillary equipment. While audible altimeters are not mandatory for freely jumps, it is very unlikely you will find an experienced freeflyer without at least one. They are an invaluable backup piece of equipment. It is, however, the newer flyers to the discipline who require them the most. Some freely jumps can be disorientating and, when not used to the increased speed and decreased freefall time, it may be easier to lose altitude awareness. When flying at much higher freely speeds such as fast head down, it may be advised that more

than one audible is worn and the volume of the alarm is set to high. The best place to mount an audible is internally in the helmet to ensure they can be clearly heard when needed.

AADs, while not mandatory for C and D Licences at all centres, should always be worn. There are many living examples of people who would not be here today if it were not for this invaluable part of your equipment. Remember, no one ever thinks it's going to happen to them until it does! Also consider picking a reserve canopy that you would be happy landing under while unconscious. Some manufacturers make low bulk reserves so you can get a

bigger, safer reserve for the same volume. Your reserve does not need to be smaller than your main.

ORGANISE, NOT IMPROVISE

Anyone who has been freeflying for a while knows how easily a 2-way can turn into a 10-way and the next topic for consideration is planning the skydive. While jumping with your regular jump buddies on small groups, you will all have a pre-set plan that you follow week in and week out. However, when jumping with new people for the first time or in larger groups, break-off should be explicitly stated and walked through. A good →



time to do this is before boarding the aircraft! People who do not have good movement skills such as forwards and backwards should keep group sizes smaller until this is achieved, as by hanging on the outside of a group they will have people in the centre tracking past them on break-off. Sometimes the best idea is to split a larger group into small, safer groups where people will have the opportunity to learn more.

The BPA increased the opening height for both A and B Licence jumpers in 2013 and it is now set to 3,000ft. When discussing the break-off during the planning of the jump, this should be remembered and consideration given to it. Many coaches are now upping break-off on freefly jumps to 5,500ft or even slightly higher for coach jumps and larger

jumps. When experienced trackers break-off slightly higher, they should also be mindful of the line of flight – if they track up or down the line of flight, they may be reducing the available airspace on opening. If they realise they have ended up flying along the line of flight, they may tweak the heading of the track and be aware once open to fly their canopies perpendicular to the line of flight. Larger groups should always be given more time before the next group exits the aircraft to minimise this issue.

METHOD, NOT MADNESS

Next we will examine a method of breaking off that allows you to check your airspace at every stage from a sit-fly position to a full deployed canopy. The key is to be looking where you are going





Seven potentially deadly sins that reduce the safety of yourself and others

1. Not planning a break-off height
2. No audible altimeter
3. Not breaking off at pre-set height
4. Lots of inexperienced people on a larger formation
5. When back tracking, not looking the direction you are going (e.g. filming your feet)
6. Losing heading control during transition from back to belly track
7. Not having an effective track to provide adequate separation

they may then smoothly move into a back tracking position using a point on the horizon (180 degrees from the centre) to ensure the heading of the track remains straight. At this point, if you are aware there is someone on a similar heading, slowly adjust the heading to clearer airspace while continually looking around. Once you can tell the airspace above your back track is clear, you may now transition to a fast max belly track using half a barrel roll. The technique for the barrel roll should include fixing on a point on the horizon so that heading is not lost during the rotation. Now you are belly tracking. Track like a rock star – your airspace on opening depends on this. Keep looking around and also now make sure the airspace below you is clear. From now, you will move smoothly into the belly fly position and, as on all jumps, you should wave off before you pull. As soon as your canopy is fully open, fly the canopy away from the line of flight to give yourself and others more space.

If you cannot complete all of these steps while maintaining heading and safely generating enough separation to deploy, you need to raise your break-off height or reconsider jumping in a large group!

So we have covered several topics during this article which, all combined together, can help you and the others around you increase your safety margin. The key with all issues to do with our own personal safety is to make sure you have the right equipment *and* have a plan. Stay safe out there! ●

Ally Milne
– UK and European Freefly Record holder
– Full-time Instructor and Coach at Skydive Langar

*Thanks to Airtec, PD, UPT, Airkix, and Cookie Composites
tryskydiving.co.uk*

“When jumping with new people for the first time or in larger groups, break-off should be explicitly stated and walked through”

and making sure at every stage before you make a move that you can see the airspace you are moving into is clear. The larger the group, the more proficient the flyer has to be at break-off. Sooner or later, you will find a break-off corridor that isn't clear and you will need to adjust accordingly by moving to clearer airspace. You can practise break-offs on solos or you could even ask your coach to film you during a break-off drill dive.

From a sit-fly position that is facing toward the centre of the group, the flyer

should smoothly transition from sit-fly to a fast back-fly position as soon as the pre-arranged break-off height is reached. If you try to rush this stage, you may over-rotate – which can cause a great deal of height loss. From the fast back-fly position, the airspace both above and behind where the sit-flyer started must be checked to be clear. Many people just roll onto belly-fly and track from there. This does not check the airspace behind you and could cause a high speed collision. Only once they know the airspace is clear,

1 Back tracking away from a formation before barrel-rolling to the belly position,
by Ewan Cowie

2 Alan Foulkes-Williams and Henry Cressey,
by Chris Cook

3 Stay safe out there! Ally Milne,
by Gary Wainwright