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by Melissa Garcia and Ella Ran

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE DOWNSIZING



It's a topic that nearly all skydivers face at some point in their skydiving careers: *downsizing*. And it's a discussion that the Performance Designs staff has had with numerous skydivers of all experience levels over the years. Now, with the majority of incidents in skydiving occurring under fully open (and fully functional) canopies, it's that much more important to talk about when it is and is not appropriate to downsize.

PD takes this topic seriously. So if you're thinking about downsizing, here are five questions you should ask yourself first:

1. DO I REALLY NEED TO DOWNSIZE?

When jumpers who are thinking of downsizing approach the PD staff, the first thing the staff member asks them is, "Why do you want to downsize?" You'd be surprised at how many people don't know how to answer this question.

"Downsizing is really trendy ... People think they want to do [it], but it's not necessarily what they should do."

— Jason Moledzki

Consider the reasons you might give: Is it because other people tell you that you're ready to downsize? Are you in a hurry to downsize so you can eventually learn to swoop? And let's be honest here ... do you want to look "cool" under a smaller, faster canopy?

Now ask yourself: Are my reasons appropriate?

In a video on PD's YouTube channel, Jason Moledzki—PD Factory Team member and founder of Flight-1—puts it well:

"You can generally move to a different type of parachute and find something that's going to be more advanced, more fun, faster and even more exciting to fly without necessarily having to downsize to a smaller parachute. Downsizing is really trendy ... People think they want to do [it], but it's not necessarily what they should do."

Whatever your reason may be, remember that getting hurt as a result of downsizing before you're ready is a costly but avoidable mistake.



JASON MOLEDZKI

Photo by Jeannie Bartholomew

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2. DO I UNDERSTAND WHICH PERFORMANCE FACTORS WILL CHANGE WITH A NEW CANOPY?

There are many factors to consider when deciding whether to downsize, including what canopy you're currently jumping, how many jumps you have, how often you jump and what your goals are ... the list goes on.

You'll also need to consider the type of wing you'll be moving to: Is it elliptical? Is it cross-braced? Is it a 7-cell or 9-cell design? Do you understand the difference in performance based on all of these factors?

Then think about the size of the new canopy. Bear in mind that you'll experience higher performance under *any* wing that is smaller than what you've jumped until now, no matter what size it is. Smaller canopies are more responsive to input, magnifying the effects of small errors that may go unnoticed on larger canopies.

"People often make the mistake of downsizing to improve performance instead of raising or training their skill level."

—Shannon Pilcher

3. DO I HAVE ENOUGH EXPERIENCE UNDER MY CURRENT CANOPY?

PD Factory Team member and Flight-1 founder Shannon Pilcher, one of the most experienced canopy pilots out there, had this to say in his video on PD's YouTube channel:

"People often make the mistake of downsizing to improve performance instead of raising or training their skill level.

Whatever parachute you have, people who are watching you on the ground should see you land and think, 'Man, that guy is a badass canopy pilot.' If you can't fly your canopy in various situations that you can be confronted with, then you have no business really downsizing or changing models to something sportier or faster."

Experience takes *time*. It is not gained over a handful of jumps or even hundreds but over months, years and even decades of education and practice. It is from



SHANNON PILCHER

Photo by Ori Kuper



experience that skydivers learn how to fly their canopies in *any* conditions.

Three hundred jumps equates to approximately 10 hours of canopy flight. Pete Allum, a Flight-1 instructor and veteran of more than 30,000 jumps, uses a great analogy in his *SkydiveMag.com* article, “The Two Ways to Die.”

“When we learn to drive, we are nervous and make mistakes, but after only a short while, more than 10 hours, we learn the basics, our awareness and abilities slowly increase (and driving is a very normal everyday activity). However, if someone asked us to drive a Formula-1 car at top speed in traffic after only 10 hours of driving experience, we might ask them if they were insane.”

Maxine Tate, chief operating officer for Flight-1 and the PD Factory Team, says, “There’s a huge difference between spending those 10 hours just coming down after a jump and actually dedicating time to learning all available control inputs. It’s important to get to know your canopy and how to use all emergency tools.”

4. CAN I COMFORTABLY LAND MY CURRENT CANOPY IN CONDITIONS THAT ARE LESS THAN IDEAL?

Landing is easy when you know the landing area like the back of your hand, the

winds are light and variable, there are no traffic issues and all goes according to plan. But what happens when conditions are less than ideal? How about when it all goes horribly, the spot’s bad and the only direction you can land is downwind, and someone cuts you off or someone’s kid or dog runs out in front of you when you’re landing?

“Three hundred jumps equates to approximately 10 hours of canopy flight.”

—Pete Allum

Don’t assume that just because you know your landing area well you’ll be safe under a smaller canopy. The reality is you can’t control the

actions of other jumpers and people.

Which brings us to our last point.

5. HAVE I ASKED ADVICE FROM CREDIBLE INSTRUCTORS AND SOURCES?

Asking the right people the right questions goes a long way. Don’t take for granted that the people offering you advice on downsizing actually know what they’re talking about. Consider the people you’re talking to. Are they reputable canopy coaches? Instructors? Do they have good track records for safety? Seek out appropriate sources and advice, and *listen to them*.

Not sure where to look? Here are some great starting points:

- ▶ The article “Wing Loading and Its Effect” and wing loading charts for PD products at performancedesigns.com
- ▶ “The Two Ways to Die” by Pete Allum, “Loss of Altitude” by Maxine Tate and “Considered Upsizing?” by Dan Brodsky-Chenfeld on skydivemag.com

Prefer videos? Visit PD’s YouTube channel and watch “Jason Moledzki on Downsizing” and “Shannon Pilcher on Downsizing.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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PETE ALLUM

Photo by Kenneth Gajda