

WHAT IS THE TRUE COST OF A COMMERCIAL CHUTE?

There is never a perfect package in anything you buy in life, so there is always a compromise. We could build the chutes out of steel and they would last forever, but they would not fly! So I will tell you up front that my chutes last as long as possible, but most of my operators replace their equipment every year or so, or even more often in high UV or high usage locations because they do not want their customers to fly in chutes that look old or worn out. Would you want your family or friends or yourself to fly in an old worn out piece of junk? I don't think so. Nor do your customers want this, so appearance is everything when they consider safety of your boat over others. Besides, it is just taking pride in your work.

USA operators are tightly controlled now by the insurance agencies are very concerned about safety and they replace the chutes often because new chutes sell more rides than old looking chutes with repairs and are much safer. Customers do not want to fly in old looking chutes. So, again, nothing lasts forever, but the question is, did it last long enough to feel you got your money's worth out of it and did you get good value for the \$ spent? I am sure you will say YES to our chutes.

We did an analysis of how much the chutes REALLY cost per rider and they are actually pennies per rider. You could do this, too, in your business...simply divide the cost of the chute by the number of riders it has served and there you have it. You will find out that if the chute lasts even 1-2 years, its true cost is pennies per rider. It is really the cheapest part of your business; your labor, insurance, boat repairs, boat payments, advertising, taxes, etc. are all much more. The chute is your cheapest investment and should be replaced more frequently. Now having said that, you will receive great value as our chutes are stronger, fly better, and shouldn't fade prematurely or color bleed. All of our colors are color fast from the factory. They all have an ultraviolet (UV) inhibitor, but as sun screen in a hot sun, it will wear off with time and usage. Even if you are in the sun all day, you must re-apply sunscreen; but there is no way to do this with the chute. The more you use it the more you use it up and the more porous the ripstop becomes as the sun breaks down the UV protection applied to the ripstop nylon and eventually attacks the ripstop directly.

So, with age comes another factor and that is you have to burn more gas to tow it. This will really increase your operating costs! An older chute is wearing out and allowing air to pass through the ripstop, thus losing lift. The simple exercise for you to do is put a new chute ripstop material to your mouth and see if you can suck air through it. Now take a well-worn, used chute and do the same. You will be amazed as to how much air goes through the weaker material. When the chutes are new, they are Zero Porosity...they do not let any air pass through the ripstop. They have a lot of lift and you save gas. The more you use something, the more you use it up. This is why professional commercial operators replace their chutes often as a new chute will save you lots of gas or diesel money and this cuts down significantly on operating costs. They will more than pay for themselves if you replace them often. It is like changing an oil filter when you change the oil. Plus, newer chutes are safer. You do not want a weak chute in the air if you get in a tight spot with the wind! It pays to replace them often and the chutes cost less than you would think. New chutes are safer, look great for the public and save you money over the long run. They will create a very professional image for you.

So, everything has a limited life in the sun, no matter what the product. Again, there are no perfect packages and nothing lasts forever. Please be sure your expectations are realistic. And we could build the light wind/no wind chutes out of heavy material and they will no doubt last a lot longer than the thinner material. However, the heavy chutes are very difficult if not impossible to inflate and launch in lower winds. You will burn so much more gas towing them it is just not the answer. The heavy material will last a lot longer but it is not suitable for lower winds, so again we must compromise to get the desired effect. And again, no perfect packages exist. We must get as close as we can with our design and materials but all is a trade-off. That is why we use the lighter weight material for lower winds and the heavier material for higher winds.

The bottom-line is, be sure your expectations are realistic. It may seem the chutes are expensive to start out but if you analyze the TRUE cost per rider the chutes are the cheapest part of a commercial business. Besides, a new chute sells more rides and is much safer to use. The last thing a commercial operator needs is to fly a chute beyond its life and have it rip when being used.

So, how do you know when to retire chutes? That is very easy to answer...before they are used up and are no good as a backup canopy to a new chute. Now to determine this, ask yourself...most importantly, how does the chute look? Is it very faded, has it had a lot of repairs and do the repairs look bad? Are there patches all over? Is it tearing more easily? And most importantly, has it become porous? Is it allowing air to pass through the canopy? Do the lines look "fuzzy"? Do the breath test and put the old ripstop (in every color) up to your mouth and try suck air in...can you breathe through the ripstop? If so, it is wearing out or is worn out. Also, do the stress test: push your thumb as hard as you can in each color and see if you are able to tear the ripstop and push your thumb through. If you can rip the chute with your thumb, do not fly that chute anymore, not even as a backup as it is already beyond its life. Another good sign is...we hear commercial operators say the "chute ripped in the air". While this may be true sometimes, it is a CLEAR indication that the chute is well beyond its life. Again, do not fly the chutes beyond their life expectancy; only bad things can happen. Do not expect any more out of your chute other than what it can deliver.

I am always amazed when a commercial operator sends a chute back that is clearly used up and wants it repaired. We get these chutes in all the time and we always wonder.... what are they thinking? Plus, there are pictures all over the internet of people flying commercially in chutes that are awful looking. If an accident occurs in those chutes, the attorneys will have a hay day! It is not smart to pinch pennies with the chutes!

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