

Kate Cooper's BIG-WAY TIPS

How to GET ON and STAY ON a Big-way
aka: *How not to irritate the organiser*

People often approach me with the question: "I'm good, I know I'm good but no-one knows me. How can I get invited on big-way formations and World Records?"

GETTING ON

The answer is "just add air". In order for a person to be invited to these elite loads, they need to be either known by the organisers of the event or recommended by respected jumpers. Here's how:

1 Big-way camp

Attend a big-way camp or boogie where you can spend quality time with the organiser. Big-way camps allow you to show your talents in a 'no fault' atmosphere. Regardless of the outcome of any specific skydive, each participant can demonstrate their skills to active organisers. After the event send a brief email to the organiser thanking them for their time, reminding them who you are and asking permission for future recommendations.

2 Quality street

We're looking for quality (not quantity) of recent skydives. A 4-way or 8-way team or aggressive tunnel training is worth more than hundreds of lower quality fun jumps at boogies. It's generally easy to train a good team jumper to do big-ways because they are attuned to coaching – they listen well and learn.

3 Currency counts

Someone who has made 200+ jumps in the last six months will get my attention over an equally unknown person who has 1,000 jumps in 15 years. I'll take the current low-timer over the uncurrent mid-timer in almost any case, all other things being equal.

4 Don't give up

This applies especially if you are a low experience skydiver or from a small DZ. If you are told "No" once, find out what the organiser is looking for in terms of experience, then go out and get it. When you re-apply, remind them who you are and that you've gone out of your way to accomplish their request. They'll be impressed!

5 Create a skydiving résumé

Include your name, email, snail address, phone numbers, height and weight. For skydiving experience have the year you first jumped, your total jumps, largest formation attempted and largest completed. Briefly add relevant positive factors, eg, team, tunnel or camp time. List the slot(s) that best reflect your current abilities for success: Base, early diver, early floater, long diver, long floater, or (organisers love this) **any slot is fine**.

6 Get references

Start creating a list of known organisers who will act as referees. Ask their permission, then include their names and email addresses on your resume. Knowing that respected jumpers are willing to recommend a person goes a long way in terms of making decisions for events.



100-way Stairstep at Kaleidoscope
by Gustavo Cabana

STAYING ON

You're on the big load! You followed the steps and you have the invite, what now?

1 Do paperwork promptly

Return deposits and forms quickly and with all information. Once you're at the event, introduce yourself by first name and surname to the organiser(s) when convenient. Don't be offended if they forget your name but correct them if they call you by another name.

2 Assess your slot

Look at the slot you've been assigned and decide if it reflects your current talents. If you should be moved, let your plane captain know **asap**. He or she will pass that information on to the organiser.

3 Don't be late

Never. Not once. It's really irritating to try and track down people for dirtdives or debriefs. Have access to a watch so you're on time. Pair up and have a 'buddy system' so you **always** let your buddy know where you are, no matter where it is or for how short a time.

4 Get your fall rate right

Bring all your suits and weights. You need to be in the middle of your fall rate range, wherever you are in the formation. If you need more lead or more suit, handle it. Be ready to loan stuff to others.

5 Be invisible

Organisers aren't looking for the funniest jokes or the fastest swoop. They want to see a complete formation. During a video debrief, if the organiser asks "Who's this?", answer with your complete name, "Joanna Bloggs". Hearing "That's me" is frustrating when you're dealing with a lot of people! Relax, it's often not a bad thing, just the organiser getting to know who's who on the screen. If you're asked to explain a specific action, keep it simple. "I made an error of judgement" goes a long way over a blow-by-blow account of a mistake. Don't ask the organiser questions that other people can easily answer, like "What time is breakfast?".

6 Don't argue

This makes you visible. If you really are right and the organiser is wrong, then get your facts straight and present them to your organiser or plane captain without emotion. Video backing up your point of view is good. Don't take responsibility for an error that isn't yours but don't take it personally if a mistake is made. People wear similar suits and rigs.

7 Don't get lost

It's a one point skydive. Know a minimum of five major keys on different people to navigate by. Include the base and several waves. At least one should be opposite you so, if either you or the formation is off heading, you can recognise it easily.



Know who exits the plane in front of you and who docks both in front and behind you so if you are late (or early – they are equal offences) you know who's way to stay out of. The ability to dirt dive the entire skydive in your head, from both your point of view and the camera's eye, is very helpful for visualising where your slot is.

8 Don't sneak!

Do not come up to the organiser or plane captain 'volunteering' information about other participants unless it is critical to the outcome of the dive or safety. Even so, do this only if you are sure that no-one else on the dive knows this information. Time is precious.

9 Take care of yourself

Drink water during the day and at night. Sleep. Eat a lot of healthy snacks rather than large meals that will slow you down.

10 Be aware, be safe

Don't pull low. Wear an audible alti and set it to the correct altitudes for break-off and deploying. If break-off is keyed from the centre, trust them – don't go early, don't go late. Track like your life depends on it. It does! Clear your air, deploy your canopy. Have your hands on the risers during deployment, look out for other traffic **all** the time. Don't hook or make radical manoeuvres. After landing collapse your canopy quickly and turn to face oncoming traffic while picking up your canopy and moving to the side. The jump's not over until you're safely in the packing area.

11 Use the talent around

Chances are, there's someone near you who knows the answers to the questions you don't really want to ask in front of a large group. Ask them. People **love** being asked questions. Take advantage of the amazing amount of talent to be found on any large formation load.

12 Don't hurt Kate!

*Photos from Empuria
Christmas Boogie by
Gustavo Cabana*



Enjoy your journey exploring large formation skydiving! It's a wonderful and very social aspect of the sport. The feeling of sharing success with 100, 200, or 400 people together is incredibly special and 100% recommended! I look forward to sharing air with you in the future. Blue skies, red suits!

Kate Cooper

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Links:

[For Starters Jumping in a larger formations](#)

[Big-way Skills](#)

[Big Ways](#)

[Safety in a Big Way](#)

[Getting the most from being organised](#)

[Back to February 2007 contents](#)