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Spring is beginning and most of our thoughts are shifting from the cold short days to longer days and blue skies. After a long winter in many places it is time to break out the old Powered Parachute and get it ready to fly again. The big question is what should I check and is my machine ready to fly. As far as the machine goes, I am not the expert; however I will try and give a few hints on the wing.

One of the biggest heartbreaks in the spring is pulling your wing out of the chute bag to inspect it and finding it was destroyed by some nasty little rodent trying to keep warm. If you store your machine in a building that is not rodent free you might want to start checking your wing a little earlier so you have time to send it to the manufacturer for repairs. I have seen several wings over the last few years come in to our shop in the spring with very large chew holes in them. This can be a very expensive repair if it can be repaired at all. The best thing to do is to insure the wing was stored properly to begin with.

After taking your wing out you need to find a clean, dry location to begin laying out the wing for an inspection. If you have a large enough garage or storage facility you may think about building yourself a hanging rack out of PVC pipe, some rope, pulleys and some carpenter wood clamps. This will help in inspecting the wing and also allow you to remove all of the little goodies you picked up while flying. If the location is right you won't even have to remove the wing from your machine and maybe a couple of your flying buddies can use it too. If this is not possible you will need to lay the canopy flat, with the bottom surface down on a table or any clean, flat surface. Begin at one end, visually inspecting each panel and seam thoroughly, one panel at a time. Check for any burns, discoloration, snags, rips, tears, failed seams, etc. Turn the canopy over and repeat this procedure for the bottom surface. If you put your wing away in the fall a bit wet and it mildewed, don't worry too much. Mildew is unsightly and it stinks, but it doesn't really weaken the fabric. Mildew is an organism that attacks the organic matter your wing picks up on the ground. It does not attack the nylon or spectra lines because they are manmade. You can normally use a rag with soapy water on to spot clean the fabric. Some type of gentle soap is your best bet. Make sure to rinse the area you cleaned so you don't leave any soap residue behind. Included in the inspection of the bottom surface will be the line attachments and lines themselves.

Once you have inspected the wing you will need to ensure that there are no twists in the line groups. Look for frayed and misrouted lines. Try to keep the lines as clean as possible and use your line socks. Dirt that gets into the lines abrades the lines from inside and can shorten the life of the lines.

Check the connection to the machine ensuring that the control lines are routed through the proper pulleys and that they travel freely. While you are checking the pulleys for proper routing you also need to check them for serviceability. I've seen several broken

pulleys and some that had rotated due to poor manufacturing so the lines were rubbing on the metal portion; this will abrade the steering lines pretty quick and will need to be replaced. Tighten the quick links following the manufacturer's recommendations for tightness. Caution should be taken when tightening the quick links not to over tighten them, this will damage the link and they will need to be replaced. This is also good time to replace some of the older links that are not stainless steel. The older links are cadmium plated and once the plating wears off the links will rust and damage the lines.

Once you are satisfied your wing is ready to fly it is time to check your machine. Again I will not get in to that but I would like to caution you on one thing. Over the winter months sometimes your battery will die. You're in a hurry to fly so you go to the local Wal-Mart and pick-up a motor cycle battery and hook it up to your machine. Most pilots don't think about the little discharge tube on the battery and just go with it. What we have seen happen is the battery will get warm and the acid is discharged while the engine is running. This will happen normally at the most inopportune time. When the wing is laid out for flight. The prop turns the drops into a mist and it ends up all over your wing. Everyone knows what battery acid does when it gets on fabric, it's not pretty. Please be careful if you have to use a wet battery. Make sure you use something to catch any discharge from the battery. A plastic tube commonly used for flowers works with a piece of cotton stuffed in the bottom. I am not telling anyone to use the cheaper battery, but this is what you need to know if you have to.

The last thing I will cover is more of a nice to know thing. We have received several wings in the past that looked to have battery acid damage on them. When the owners were contacted we were told that was impossible because they had a pull starter or sealed batteries. After doing some research and questioning we came to the conclusion that the wings were flown out of a freshly fertilized fields and the fertilizers that were used were very acidic. Be careful of the fields you fly out of in the spring. The farmers are getting them ready to plant and use some chemicals that could damage your wing.

Taking the time in the spring to do a proper and through inspection will in the long run save you some headaches in the future. If you have any questions about your wing, please contact the manufacturer. If at any time you remove your wing or replace your wing you must do a through ground taxi to insure your wing is set-up properly prior to leaving the ground. It is better to find out something is not set right on the ground then in the air.