

photo U of A Skydivers



All we can say is: how high can you get?

by Doug Ambrosie

It's rather pointless to try and ask a skydiver why he hurls himself out of airplanes. Most jumpers are hard put to answer.

To try and compare it to any other sport leaves a skydiver just about wordless. The sensations that a person feels in free-fall are as numerous as the 5000 Canadians that jump out of airplanes every year. The adrenalin-rush you get during those all too brief seconds push your senses to their limit. To get out into the air and feel the wind slip around your body at speeds of more than 120 mph sends your mind flying just as fast as your body is falling.

There are periods during free-fall when time seems to all but stop. Seconds seem like minutes. You look around and a great sense of aloneness engulfs you. You've never felt more free in all your life. You pull the rip-cord. You catch a brief flash of color in the corner of your eye. A slight tug on the shoulders and everything is quiet.

And there you are a half mile above the ground in beautiful, total silence. Over-flowing with a great sense of accomplishment, you try to recount what you've just experienced but you find you really can't put it into words. You'll think about the jump for hours, but chances are the only conclusion you'll come to is that it was great.

For the novice it's a long way from the ground to the clouds, and just as long from the front doorstep to the training grounds. Some scientists observe that man has an innate fear of falling, an innate fear of weightlessness. It could be that the aspiring jumper wants to conquer this fear. Perhaps he takes up the sport because he loves speed, and

skydiving is the fastest non-mechanical sport there is. He might simply enjoy the sensation of total freedom he experiences while jumping.

Perhaps it all comes down to a desire to try something different, and in skydiving, every single jump is different from that first most frightening one.

The first jump a student makes catapults him into a world of PLF's, BSR's, airplane procedures, body positions, verbal counts and parachute packing. Training courses take about fourteen hours of classroom and drop-zone lessons given by licensed instructors from the Canadian Sport Parachuting Association.

Before being accepted for skydiving training, a medical examination indicating a healthy physical condition is mandatory. Other than that, ninety dollars covers equipment upkeep, membership dues, and instructor fees as required by the U of A Skydivers Club. After the first dive a student's expenses are \$7 per jump up until he or she qualifies for a license, which takes about thirty dives.

The experience of the first jump is one which a student will never forget as long as he lives. No matter how many jumps he makes later on, the first one will remain as clear in his mind as his most recent dive. The memorable day might go something like this:

Your instructor tells you to gear up. It's Saturday morning and you've just completed your last two hours of training before your big jump. You crawled out of bed this morning aching from parachute landing practice and bodyposition exercises. One of the other students picked you up and both of you drove the 65 miles out to the drop-zone in Andrew.

Fully rigged up, the JM (Jumpmaster) now checks your's and the two other student's rigs for a snug fit. You walk out to the airplane and since you are the last to get in you will be the first to jump out. The jumpmaster hooks your static line to the ring in the floor of the aircraft. He then closes the door and the pilot starts the engine.

Now you're airborne and climbing slowly to your jump altitude of 2,800 feet. You have butterflies. At 2,800 feet the JM opens the door and a cool blast of 60 mph wind hits you in the face. All of a sudden you realize that you are actually going to jump out of this airplane!

The JM yells "cut!", the airplane slows down and he tells you to get ready. You climb from your kneeling position out onto the wheel of the airplane, exactly as you have practiced half a dozen times or more on the ground. The only difference is that now you have a 60 mph wind to contend with, and no matter how far you stretch, your foot will not reach the ground.

The jumpmaster taps you on the shoulder, you look up, and push off. "Arch!" he yells. You throw yourself into position and count "arch-thousand, two-thousand..." You hear yourself shouting the words but all you can feel is one big rush. A soon-to-be-familiar tug at your shoulders and the next thing you know you're sitting under an orange and white canopy, seemingly motionless.

A few moments later you touch down and that big bag of nylon crumples above your head. When you stand up and look at the sky, you feel about two feet tall.

What happened in the last few seconds? Let's see you try to explain it.

Happy jumping.

To all persons interested in taking up skydiving this summer:

U of A Skydivers course openings are available in June and July. Applicants are asked to bring a \$25 refundable deposit on the \$90 total cost of the course.

This summer information concerning skydiving and further courses will be available by phoning SUB Information. Ask for the U of A Skydivers' telephone number, effective May 1st.



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