

# SKYDIVE 2023

# THE REVIEW

BRITISH SKYDIVING







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This photo and cover image by Andy Ford

# WELCOME

Dear fellow skydiver,

I'm not sure I knew what I was in for when I plunked down into the Editor-In-Chief seat, recently vacated by the incomparable Liz Ashley, this past soggy summertime. I've been in the sport long enough to see quite a few years reviewed, but this one feels special, somehow: resolute folk knocking out sparkly new records in the face of brutal weather surprises; British Skydiving suddenly advancing the practice of in-county display jumps by a solid measure; even a Red Bull skate park, hanging heavily under a great big balloon. I feel lucky to have watched it all transpire.

I want to remind you, too, before I clear the path for you to dive in:

**this magazine is about you.** Its entire reason for being is to help you to **stay safer, progress more confidently and achieve your goals in the sport.** If there's any way you can suggest that might increase this publication's value to you in meeting those goals, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at editor@britishskydiving.org.

We hope you enjoy flipping through our reweaving of this year as much as we've enjoyed reweaving it. Thanks, this year as always, for your readership – and as to 2024? Let's gooooooooooooo!

*Ad astra,*  
Annette Lyn O'Neil

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# CHAIR'S END OF YEAR REVIEW

Mary Barratt, Chair of British Skydiving



**2023, WHAT AN** exciting year it's been for British Skydiving, and for me as the incoming Chair.

From my point of view, British Skydiving's most notable achievement this year has been recruiting and onboarding a CEO. This is a new role within the Association, and moving from a COO to a CEO is really quite a big thing; it places significant emphasis on having leadership that drives strategic decisions with a view to the long-term success of the organisation and proactively shapes the culture of the leadership team, alongside overseeing everything on the operations side of the organisation. So, the Board gave this a good deal of attention during the first half of the year, which led to Rob Gibson joining British Skydiving in August. I've been delighted to see him get off to a great start, and I'm also pleased to note that Rob and I are already building a close working relationship and have started looking at key areas for improvement such as governance, organisational effectiveness and relationships with the Association's various stakeholders.

Next on the list of notable achievements for 2023 is another key piece of work by the Board. We went beyond just bridging the gap in British Skydiving's safety

and training resources that Tony Butler's retirement presented and took it as an opportunity to rethink and future-proof this area of the Association's provision. The work undertaken by the Future Resource Planning Working Group meant the Association could take full advantage of that opportunity; we configured a new Safety, Training & Competitions team of three, with Jeff Montgomery in the leadership role. This sees a significant strengthening of British Skydiving's safety and training provision. It ensures the team has the ability to meet an increase in demand for courses. It addresses the risks inherent in the previous arrangement in terms of single points of failure. And, as Jeff's STC review indicates, it builds in capacity for continued professional development and other crucial tasks, such as review of courses and documents.

Signing off British Skydiving's Strategic Plan for 2023-27 also sits high on that list of achievements for the year (see p. 12). Defining the vision for British Skydiving's future is a key part of the Board's remit. It is not a task to be taken lightly. Continuing to work on this during 2023 has resulted in a realistic and ambitious vision for the Association, and robust goals aligned with that vision. In conjunction with that, we have been clear that the capture of data and meaningful performance metrics needs more attention in order to monitor and support progress. So, when Rob joined in August the Board was able to share a plan setting out a clearly defined vision, five top-level goals and accompanying sub-goals, and broadly indicating the terms in which we see progress on this being measured across the next four years. Rob brings significant experience in this area so is in a good position to drive the plan forward operationally, which will include ensuring that delivery of the plan makes best use of the Association's resources.

There have been many other noteworthy achievements, initiatives and changes across the year. This includes moving to a new format for *Skydive the Mag*, Annette O'Neil joining the team as our new Editor and Dr Jake Hard taking up the volunteer role of Medical Advisor. It includes launching a line of British Skydiving merchandising, which looks promising in terms of building brand visibility and leveraging commercial opportunities. British Skydiving has also commissioned an external company, In Safer Hands, to manage safeguarding matters on the Association's behalf. This is an important part of making sure British Skydiving's members are listened to and supported. It is key to driving forward a shift in the culture of the sport, and it also meets the need for impartiality and additional expertise. As a Director who feels strongly about the Association's commitment to supporting members and opening up skydiving to under-represented groups, I'm particularly proud when I look back over the work done by the new Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality Subcommittee this year, which Eleanor Southworth shares in her review of the Member Development Committee's year.

Reviewing 2023, I feel immense gratitude to my fellow Board members who have worked incredibly hard across the year. This is particularly impressive given that two of those colleagues had to step down mid-term, meaning we've not been a consistent team of twelve across the whole year. I have also greatly appreciated the work done by the various committees, which makes such a significant impact on the experience of British Skydiving's members (as captured in the reviews from the committee chairs). And a huge "thank you" needs to be extended to all the members of the working groups and those who fulfil volunteer roles; the Association certainly couldn't have achieved all it has this year without their contributions (and if any members



# 2023 ANNUAL REVIEW STATEMENT

*Robert Gibson, CEO British Skydiving*

out there are interested, there's always room for more volunteers). My thanks also go to the operations team for their outstanding dedication to the Association; it's been a period of uncertainty and challenge for them all, and yet the team has kept everything going, made Rob very welcome at HQ and supported me in my new role.

So, while there have been some difficulties and delays, much has been accomplished this year. Excitingly, this has covered off the groundwork required before British Skydiving can begin to run with the Strategic Plan and start the process of repositioning itself as a learning, future-facing organisation that consistently works effectively for its members and with its stakeholders and partners. Of course, this won't be a quick process; but I am confident that British Skydiving is now able to start the journey. So, our members can expect to see more key pieces of work taking place over the coming year. This will include the Strategic Plan being rolled out across all committees, and a review of the Safety & Training Committee and Riggers Subcommittee, which has been pending for some time. A new working group will be set up to focus on the relationship between the Association and PTOs, which reflects British Skydiving's commitment to developing more effective ways of working with DZOs and PTOs. The Expo WG will undertake a review to ensure this showcase event keeps improving and stays aligned with that all-important Strategic Plan. There will also be some adjustments to the way the Board operates, which will respond to the recommendations of an independent board review that has taken place this year. I am looking forward to welcoming new Directors to the Board in January, including a new Independent Non-executive Director. I am also looking forward to working with this team, and Rob, over the coming year as we continue to shape the future of British Skydiving as a standout NGB.



**THROUGHOUT MOST OF** my career, I have worked in sport. And that's because sport occupies an incredibly special place in my heart. I have seen the wonderful things sport can do – from a community level, through to winning medals at the Olympic Games, sport can change people's lives for the better.

Sport plays a vital role in society, providing both physical and mental health benefits to individuals and communities alike. Skydiving is a unique and exhilarating sport that offers several advantages, both for the individual skydiver and for society.

During my visits to dropzones (DZs) across the country, I have seen that skydiving is a social sport that brings people together from all walks of life. Skydivers form close bonds with each other, DZs are welcoming and supportive, and skydiving can inspire and motivate others. Skydivers are adventurous and courageous individuals. Your achievements inspire others to challenge themselves and to pursue their dreams.

Listening and engaging with DZ owners, instructors and members, I am

gaining valuable insight and feedback on British Skydiving's performance as an NGB. Over the course of the coming year, we will be turning this insight into action. Action that will see meaningful change such as the member value proposition, instructor courses and the way members and DZOs interact with British Skydiving.

You may wonder why a non-skydiving person is at the helm of British Skydiving, and what it is I can offer to skydiving. What I offer is blood, sweat, tears and toil, and my determination to develop the Association into a sustainable governing body, resilient to changes the future may bring.

2024 will lay the foundations for this paradigm shift. We need to be agile to change. We need to listen and understand the needs of all our stakeholders. We must have transparency and be clear with our decision making. Our communication with our member and partners must be free-flowing and prompt.

British Skydiving is committed to you. Making this commitment is about having the courage to go through the unknowns, appreciating that success is not final and failure isn't ruinous. It is the courage to continue that counts. And it is this courage that I call upon from you all to stand as one, as we go through these unknowns together.

As we travel through these unknowns, we learn. When we learn, we develop capabilities that we would never be able to get through other means.

Sport can change people's lives for the better. Skydiving can change people's lives for the better. Ask yourself: how uncomfortable with change are you willing to become for skydiving in the UK to reach its fullest potential?

# FINANCE

Natasha Higman, Treasurer



**THE MAKE-UP** of the 2023 Finance Committee was Natasha Higman (Treasurer and Committee Chair), Joanne Shaw (Committee Vice-Chair), Adrian Bond, Craig Poxon, Jack Davies (Chair of ITSG), Tony Crilly, John Jake and Gareth Thomas. We are ably supported by Lise Moore, Head of Finance and Operations, who is the committee's secretary. We wish Wendy Dewberry well, after she left us to travel in Australia during the year.

Reporting to the Finance Committee, the Information Technology Strategy Group ("ITSG") has focused its attention on the future of our membership system. The contract with the current provider, Eudonet, has a fixed term and options at the end of that term are being investigated. They include extending the term, but we are also taking the opportunity to investigate alternative systems and consider the implications of a move.

As trailed last year, the Merchandising Working Group has implemented our online store, from which anyone can buy a range of branded products. The low fixed costs hopefully mean that this will pay for itself and contribute to surpluses. We will evaluate the uptake and benefit of the store during 2024.

Travel medical insurance is a topic which is an increasingly difficult issue for some of our members. It's not only those wishing to attend SOS or JOS

events in the US who are struggling to find insurers who will provide medical expenses coverage. I have spent a significant amount of time talking to several insurance companies directly, as well as working with two different insurance brokers to investigate what options there may be. I was hoping that we may be able to find a group policy for our members with fewer restrictions. Unfortunately, all these discussions have proven unsuccessful. Group medical insurance tends to be geared towards employers rather than sports associations, is expensive and does not always include travel cover. Group travel medical insurance is rare and appears to require a larger total group across which to spread the risk. Although we have had quotes for personal accident and life insurance (both of which pay out a single lump sum in the event of an injury or death), that does not help with medical expenses coverage. I currently feel I have reached the end of the road with this endeavour; however, I remain open to being introduced to insurers or brokers who may be able to help find a policy.

From a financial standpoint, the Association continues to have significant accumulated reserves. In line with guidance from the Charity Commission, we set a reserves policy in 2022 and have implemented that in our investment strategy during 2023. This means that we continue to hold the bulk of our investment in low-risk, regular-return investments, making the most of interest rates on savings. We have also taken the step to invest a proportion in medium-risk funds and hope to ensure the value of our portfolio does not suffer from reductions in real terms because of the rate of inflation.

I am pleased to report that the increase in both membership numbers and the membership fee means that for the financial year to 30 June, our income is higher than the previous year. Unfortunately, our costs are also higher, so we are reporting a deficit for the financial year once again.



**I HOPE YOU** have all had a successful 2023, whether you have just started jumping; you are enjoying the sport or progressing with coaching and instructional ratings; or you are competing and taking part in various British Skydiving events and competitions.

This last year has brought considerable changes to the Association and in September 2023 I moved into a new role, which I am honoured and privileged to hold, continuing to represent the interests of British Skydiving as Head of Safety, Training & Competitions (HOST&C). As most of you may know, my previous role was as the Safety & Technical Officer (STO), working closely with Tony Butler, our former Chief Operating Officer (COO), who recently retired after more than 40 years of devoted service to British Skydiving. We wish him well in his retirement and congratulate him in his appointment as a new Vice President



# SAFETY & TRAINING REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2023

*Jeff Montgomery, Head of Safety, Training & Competitions*

to British Skydiving. I have no doubt that Tony will be present at the Expo, so if you see him, feel free to have a chat and thank him; however, it is very unlikely you will get a drink out of him – if anything, it will be the other way around!

Taking the helm, and leading British Skydiving into the future, is our newly appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Robert Gibson. Rob is a sport leader with an excellent record of accomplishment across multiple leading governing bodies in the high-performance sport industry. He brings a wealth of leadership experience and strategic expertise to British Skydiving, which I am sure will drive us to a continued success under his leadership, and I am delighted to be working with him.

Further introductions extend to Ryan Mancey and Kevin Dynan, who take on new roles as Safety & Training Officers (STOs). Both bring a diverse and experienced range of skills to help in the development and modernisation of our training courses. So, I hope you will join me in giving everyone a warm welcome to our family of British Skydiving.

Some other changes that took place in 2023 included the revision of our Camera Manual, which now includes a training record card detailing new requirements for anyone wanting to start wearing a camera in free fall or under canopy. Our Pilot's Manual also went through a review, and you can find both Manuals on the British Skydiving website. I want to thank all

those members involved in producing the relevant content – you know who you are.

Throughout all of 2023, British Skydiving delivered 12 one-week-long Instructor Courses, covering eight different instructor ratings at six separate Affiliated Parachute Training Organisations (PTOs). A total of 118 were assessed for their respective ratings, with a total of 109 being awarded British Skydiving Instructor ratings.

During the second quarter of 2023 we completed eight regional competitions, in Formation Skydiving (four-way FS), Accuracy and Canopy Formation (CF) disciplines, at five different PTOs and in the third quarter we completed six National Championships for Accuracy, CF, four-way FS, eight-way FS, Vertical Formation Skydiving (VFS) Wing Suiting (WS) Canopy Piloting (CP), and Artistics (Free flying) at five PTOs and one abroad. A big congratulations goes to those competitors and members who established new records in 2023 within their chosen disciplines. You can find a summary online at [britishskydiving.org/members-skydiving-records](http://britishskydiving.org/members-skydiving-records).

I would like to thank the DZOs, our Instructor Examiners, Chief Instructors, Competitors, Judges, and volunteers who have given their time throughout the year in providing the facilities and resources to support our Association in delivering so many events throughout 2023. British Skydiving also held four Foundation Skills Coach Qualification

Courses at our Headquarters in Leicester, spread out through the year, for 18 of our Instructor Examiners. The qualification is slowly becoming more popular, with many members having started the training and currently four members who are now hold Foundation Skills Coach Qualifications. A huge thank you goes to Martin Soulsby and Stuart Albon for all their hard work in the development of the new qualification.

Our Safety & Training Committee (STC) and the Riggers' Subcommittee are now undertaking a review by our Safety Team, where we will consult with DZOs and Chief Instructors, where hopefully we will see changes implemented throughout 2024.

In January 2024, the day before the AGM and Skydive the Expo, we will be holding our Industry Day, which aims to deliver Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all Instructors, Riggers, and Packers, with the continuous support of United Parachute Technologies, Romero Sport & Leisure and our insurers, AXA.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of our Safety & Training Committee, the Chair of the Riggers' Subcommittee, and all those members who have worked closely with Council and British Skydiving staff, for volunteering their expertise throughout 2023 and for their continuous support to British Skydiving. As considerable change takes place, we look forward to a positive future that can better ourselves as individuals and strengthen our values, on a personal level and as a Governing Body.

# MEMBER DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Eleanor Southworth, Chair of Member Development Committee



**AS WITH ALL** our committees, the role of the Member Development Committee (MDC) ladders up to British Skydiving's overall strategy. The MDC's purpose is to engage with our members, stakeholders and wider communities in order to grow the sport, driving inclusion and nurturing connections across all demographics of the British Skydiving community and partner base. This year, the MDC's voting core was made up of five directors (Adrian Bond, Eleanor Southworth, Karl Kojro, Mark Bayada and Wes Guest) and one independent non-executive director (Joanne Shaw). We were brilliantly supported by Lise Moore as our secretary and by a whole range of staff and member volunteers. Thank you to everyone for your help this year and for the changes you have driven to improve the experiences of our members.

This year saw MDC set out its short-, mid- and long-term goals. Having this clarity of purpose ensures that the working groups we set up are moving us in the right direction. The MDC is all

about you and ensuring that you are adequately supported, whether you are doing your first jump or your 10,000th. Over the next five to ten years, the MDC aims to have improved retention and grown membership focusing on membership demographics; we want to drive effective and active two-way communication with members and DZOs, and to lead the way in terms of knowledge sharing.

The MDC has had an incredibly busy 2023 through the Development Event scheme, the work done on the future of the *Mag*, the progress made by the Coaching Structure Working Group, the improvements being driven by the Expo Working Group, and – last but by no means least – the continued focus on Inclusion, Diversity and Equality through our IDE subcommittee.

### **Looking first to Development Events.**

This year, the scheme transitioned from trial to full launch and is currently being managed by Wes Guest. The Development Event scheme offers members of British Skydiving up to £1,500 to support the running of UK-based events that respond to the needs of those at any stage of their skydiving journey (A licence and above). This might be in terms of developing skills, developing safety in the sport, or developing a sense of community. The new scheme is live and in 2023 British Skydiving invested in ten development events across a range of disciplines and experience levels, from wingsuiting in Ireland through to formation skydiving in Nottingham, and a whole host of things in between. Development Events are only possible due to organisers and volunteers, and this year alone over 30 people

volunteered their time, managing to engage over 150 participants. Due to the increasing popularity of the Development Event scheme, I would encourage you to apply early with your ideas for 2024 and look forward to seeing what interesting and quirky concepts you come up with to further enhance members experiences within the sport next year.

### **Looking next to the *Mag*.**

The future of the *Mag* has been an area of focus for a number of years. This year we successfully transitioned to a new provider and a new editor, and moved to a multi-platform digital experience for our members. We have had some brilliant articles published, including Emily Aucutt's "KISS" (Keep it Simple and Specific) series in the new instructor's section. This includes "Same Planes, Different Brains", which focuses on training neurodivergent students. The Gear Room is also worth a look, with articles from Karen Saunders – "Dethroning Your Closet Queen" has proved popular with you so far in this space. Finally, I'd encourage everyone to read "Why Women-Only Events Matter" by Kat Busby Hicks, which was published in the October edition. So far, over 1,700 new users have accessed the app; we continue to see this increasing over time, and engagement and click-through rates are growing. We are committed to listening to your feedback and will be bringing back Club News for 2024 based on this. We are also looking to expand on what the app can offer, especially around video content, so watch this space for new and exciting enhancements next year.



*“The MDC is all about you and ensuring that you are supported, whether you are doing your first jump or your 10,000th”*

**The Coaching Structure Working Group (CSWG)** is led by Martin Soulsby and supported by a range of volunteers. This working group has continued to drive change and improvement in how we do what we do when it comes to coaching our coaches. By creating standout and transferable qualifications for our coaches, we are also able to enhance the experiences of newer members. This year the CSWG celebrates the Foundation Coach qualification going live with both Ofqual and 1st4sport. We have one Training Provider already available and three more developing their syllabus. The working group has also run four pilot courses for Instructor Examiners and three pilot courses for members, which has resulted in four qualified Foundation Coaches. Congratulations! The working group and investment around this will continue into next year.

**The Expo Working Group** led by Rob Hartley (INED) was set up this year and has been hard at work in the background running a successful tender for the venue. It has also set up a formal Programme Board, contracted with EMCC (a simple-

sounding task, but months in the making), and worked incredibly hard to ensure that we remain within our budget. Ensuring a successful AGM and Expo takes a huge amount of effort from staff, directors and volunteers, and wouldn't be possible without their hard work – thank you! As ever, the Orchard Hotel has sold out and the Expo looks like it will be busier than ever this year, with over 30 exhibitors expected. We are really looking forward to welcoming you to the Expo and seeing you at the AGM.

**And finally, to our Inclusion, Diversity and Equality (IDE) Subcommittee** led by Mary Barratt. When I first stood for Council, one of the areas I was especially interested in was IDE. This year saw IDE moved from being a WG to a subcommittee and, speaking personally, I am incredibly proud of this, as it acknowledges the Association's ongoing commitment to IDE work. Our newly formed IDE Subcommittee has welcomed two volunteers as new voting members (joining the two volunteers who have continued from last year). This means the voices around the table

are becoming more reflective of the diversity the Association would like to support across its membership. It has aligned British Skydiving with Sporting Equals (a national partner of Sport England) by signing up to an Entry Level Charter Membership. This shows commitment to improving IDE and gives the Association access to consultancy, advice and resources that will enable us to better meet our goal of more ethnically diverse representation at a leadership level. Through both funding and participation from the board, IDE supported Skydive Tilstock's Rainbow Boogie and it has started the journey of supporting learning and IDE-focused problem solving, which has included AFF training for deaf students, providing BSL interpretation for deaf members attending canopy courses, and building knowledge of the Rainbow Suits Tandem Handicap System – which is potentially a game-changer for wheelchair users and those with mobility limitations wishing to make a tandem skydive. As if that wasn't enough, the subcommittee has also initiated IDE training for the operations team and directors, which will be implemented next year, and supported two of our members in publishing and distributing a ground-breaking BSL for Skydiving booklet, which will be shared with DZs.

**Looking forward to 2024**, I am excited to see who takes on the role of MDC chair and to see the committee continue to deliver against the Association's strategy and goals. If you are interested in being part of the MDC or any of the working groups, then please get in touch with the new chair once they are appointed at the inaugural council meeting in January.

# ELITE PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

*Wes Guest, Chair of Elite Performance Committee*



**2023 HAS BEEN** another great year for British Skydiving competitors. The world is returning to normal after a difficult few years, and all competitions went ahead as planned. There have been some exciting changes in teams at a national level and numerous medals were picked up on the world stage.

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

A lot of new faces joined EPC in 2023. Buzz took the helm as chair for the majority of the year, supported by Mark Bayada, Rob Hartley and myself as vice chair, before formally becoming chair in September. As always, we have also had a dedicated team of TEAs assisting us; this year, we welcomed Sam Haste as CF TEA and Dave Crowhurst as Accuracy TEA. There have also been changes in staff, with Rob Gibson taking over as CEO. Rob brings with him a wealth of experience from other competitive sports, so we are excited to work with him going forward.

#### WORLD AND EUROPEAN CUPS

The year saw our British Skydiving Team showcase exceptional talent

and passion at the 2023 World Cups and European Championships. Athletes were spread all over the world, with events taking place in the US, Norway, Czech Republic and Italy, and large British Skydiving delegations at all events. Despite picking up no medals in the World Cups this year, we had many successes in the European Championships, with four bronze medals being won in VFS, FF Freestyle, CP Team and CP Freestyle, and a silver in the CP Freestyle team event. Congratulations to all our athletes!

#### UK NATIONALS

Despite the weather, the UK Nationals were a great success, with events taking place across the country. There was a good turnout in all UKSLs, Grand Prix and National Championships. This year saw many changes in line-ups across the top teams, providing many new faces on the podium. Many British Records were also set this year (see page 37) – a promising sign for our future performance at the next World Championships.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS

Outside the competition world, this year we made an update to the British Skydiving Records Policy to bring it in line with the latest FAI policy. We saw multiple formation records being set. An immense amount of planning and dedication is put into organising these events, so my thanks go out to all organisers, along with my congratulations to all athletes involved in the records.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

For the upcoming year, we are in the process of finalising the 2024 competition calendar for UKSLs, Grand Prix and National Championships. The focus for the coming year includes developing grassroots participation by supporting a number of entry level events and supporting our athletes in their preparation for the 2024 World Championships. The Investment in Performance Working Group is also striving for more advancements in competition standards, aiming to bring in innovative changes and improvements to the way we support our teams and grow our competitions.

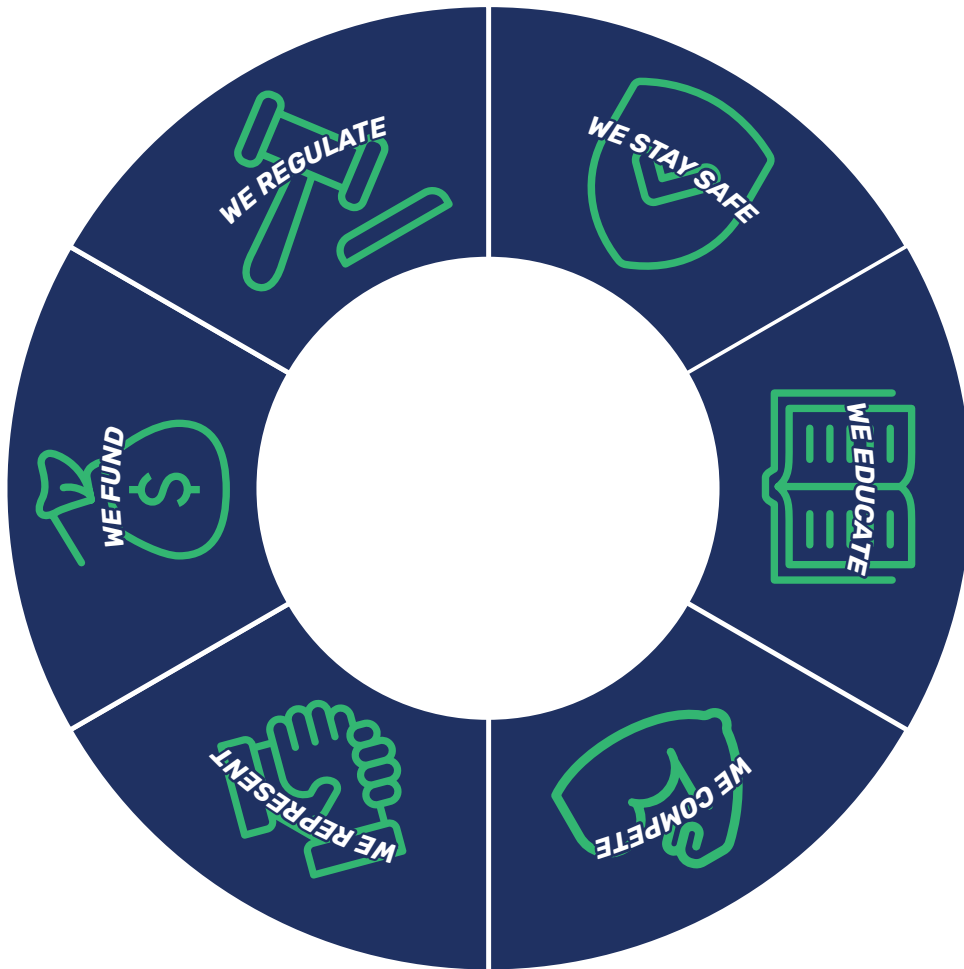
*“Despite the weather, the UK Nationals were a great success, with events taking place across the country.”*





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# WHAT DOES BRITISH SKYDIVING DO FOR ME?



## VISION, VALUES & GOALS

To secure skydiving as a safe, enjoyable and accessible sport for all.

**Respect, Integrity and Trust**

**Commitment to Excellence**

**Building Our Knowledge**

**Honesty and Openness**

### FINANCE

**ASSURE** the financial sustainability of British Skydiving.

### BRAND

**RAISING** the visibility, awareness and integrity of our brand across all channels.

### TEAM

Develop and expand the **EXPERTISE** of the British Skydiving team to advance the sport.

### MEMBERSHIP & LEGACY

**ENGAGE** with our members, stakeholders and wider communities to **GROW** the sport.

### PROCESS

**DRIVE** resilience across British Skydiving through good governance by assuring that our policies, procedures and processes are fit-for-purpose, measurable and compliant practically and legally.



# BRITISH SKYDIVING AFFILIATED DROPZONES

SKYDIVE  
HEADCORN



SKYDIVE  
HIBALDSTOW



skydive  
buzz

UK  
Parachuting

Skydive  
GB  
Yorkshire's Parachute Club

SKYDIVE  
IRELAND

Skidive  
Tilstock

SKYDIVE  
LOW

SKYDIVE  
LANGAR

Skydive  
JERSEY

BLACK  
KNIGHTS  
PARACHUTE CENTRE

Skydive  
Strathallan

skydive  
northwest



Skydive  
HINTON



Paragon  
Skydiving  
Club

SKYDIVE  
ST ANDREWS

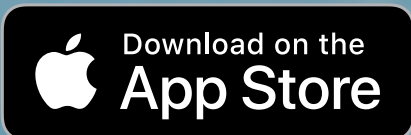
ROYAL  
AIR FORCE



# **DON'T** **MISS OUT!**



Download the *Skydive the Mag* app from the App Store or Google Play for your regular fix of inspiring stories, in-depth features and expert advice



# WE DID IT... TWICE!



A NEW FORMATION SKYDIVING RECORD IS ACHIEVED – THEN BROKEN – AT SKYDIVE LANGAR

*Words by Laura Hampton*

*Images by Andy Ford*

It is a huge honour to be able to say we have set a new formation skydiving record: a 41-way, three-point total break sequential jump!

The idea of the record attempt first came up just before Christmas. The year 2023 is Will Cooke's 40th birthday year and, though he says it's a complete coincidence, his vision to build a 40-way formation felt like a nice way to celebrate. Phil Curtis and I were sold on the idea.

The first step towards bringing it to fruition was to ascertain how realistic the number was. It's no secret that formation skydiving isn't as popular as it once was – you only need to look at the number of teams at the four-way nationals – but equally, we have so many amazingly talented FS jumpers in the UK that we felt it must be possible.

We have all done a good amount of FS jumping over the years, and we knew lots of people between us that we felt

fit the bill. We needed people with exceptional FS skills, who would be comfortable and capable in building sequential points; bigway skills were also important, but that ability to quickly get through points meant we also valued the experience of four- and eight-way competitors. We also wanted free flyers in our lineup, based on a hypothesis (that had yet to be proven) that they would be well suited to taking the last diver slots and facilitating as quick a build as possible out of our three Caravans.

The next step was to bring all those people on board – a task that required us not only to plan the timing well, but also to create a compelling offer that would encourage people to take time out of their busy schedules (including team training) to spend with us on achieving our goal.

We're so grateful to have been able to build a team of 41 formation skydivers, plus three camera flyers – and to Skydive Langar, for being able to facilitate our numbers.





*“We knew that the biggest hurdle would be the initial build”*

Once we had the people and the dropzone secured, we had to design a dive which would give us the best chance of success. We knew that the biggest hurdle, especially when using Caravans, would be the initial build (noting that Caravan exits tend to be elongated when compared to exits from an Otter, or a Skyvan). For this reason, we needed a formation which was shaped around three longer dives, but we also needed it to be solid – meaning we weren’t keen to start the jump with elements like open accordions, which can be a little flimsy at times. Instead, Will drew up a formation with a clear six-person base and surrounding loops, diamonds and pods that had clear cross references and mirroring to make it as quick to build as we could.

From there, the trick was to achieve the goal of a total break sequential formation as efficiently as we could. To meet the rules, we had to have everyone let go of





their grips and pick up an entirely different grip next. But we didn't want too much movement. For that reason, the second point brought in open accordions which we built on a slight offset, while the third point brought more people into the centre.

With formations planned, people invited and dropzone secured, we just needed the weather. And what better month to choose than July? We decided to coincide our event with Skydive Langar's Midsummer Boogie. A solid plan, pretty much guaranteed to have good weather.

Except...this is England. And the weather gods did not get the memo.

The record attempts were planned to span over two days, with us repeating the jump by adding more points each time, which would be pre-declared to Chantal as our official judge. We anticipated six jumps per day and had some fun and more challenging formations planned after the record was secured, if we wanted.

As it happened, we were plagued with weather holds. It was only thanks to the patience of our team and the dedication of our dropzone that we were able to get five jumps in over two days.

The first jump was intended to help us set the scene and we declared a two-point dive, which would itself be a new British record. Not only did we do it, but we did it by 8,000ft! It's an odd feeling to look around at 40 skydivers, all grinning and happy to have achieved a goal, but equally a little awkward about the amount of time left and not knowing what to do with it... so we just grinned at each other some more until our break-off height.

Our next jump targeted the three-point dive. Though we made three points, the second had an incorrect grip – spotted by the eagle eyes of Chantal, rendering it invalid for a record. The third jump of the day, late in the evening, was the one for us. We managed the three points neatly and efficiently, making it the second British record achieved that day.

Day two was trickier still, weather-wise, and we had a number of instances of kitting up before standing down. Huge respect to Skydive Langar for enabling us to keep trying, and being patient with us and our needs. Thanks to them, and the work of the whole team, we got two more jumps in – but, sadly, the fourth point stayed just out of reach.

We're so proud and excited to have been able to set a new British record! We all love formation skydiving so much. Our hope is that records like this help to inspire others to get involved in it, too.







# SILENT SKY

TO SKILL UP AS AN INSTRUCTOR,  
SKILL UP AS A COMMUNICATOR  
By Emily Aucutt

**E**very summer I am lucky enough to spend a big chunk of my time teaching people to skydive. This year, I had the privilege of teaching a person named Paulina. Paulina is no ordinary AFF student. She's a hard-charging, jet-setting powerhouse...and she happens to be deaf.

I had the honour of teaching Paulina from ground school through to her A licence. At first, the challenge of teaching a deaf student to skydive was a daunting prospect. Spoiler alert: as it turns out, with just a few adjustments, the process was actually a straightforward, not to mention *really* enjoyable, experience for everyone involved. I want to share that process here, in the hopes that Paulina's experience – and our experience in teaching her – might help to expand our sport's envelope of inclusivity.

## THE PLANNING

The initial planning and preparation, of course, required a sit-down with my DZ's chief instructor and operations

manager (both also AFFIs). In that meeting, we went through the ground school curriculum lesson by lesson, aiming to flag the modules of the course that might need extra attention.

The first questions we came up against were around the traditional vocalising of the Level 1 skydive and malfunction procedures: to wit, *what does the vocalisation itself accomplish?* On collective reflection, we all agreed that the physical actions involved in this module have more weight than the vocalisations and tailored our expectations accordingly.

The next challenge we faced was the Ops Manual imperative for a student radio. Per that manual (sec. 6, pg. 3), "AFF and Category System Student Skydivers must be equipped with a radio receiver for at least the first three descents." Here, we had to use our inquiring minds to find a solution that would work well for our student *whilst* being stewards of her safety and sticking to the Ops Manual. Luckily, I work with some super-smart people. They came to the rescue with a solution.



*“I want to encourage instructors to reimagine what’s possible in this sport”*

#### THE GEAR

After a bit of brainstorming, my colleagues Joe Mann and Alex Potter created a light system that Paulina would wear on her student helmet. The system, as they designed it, works via a radio receiver (placing a big tick in the Ops Manual box) and a drone remote control. The lights could be fitted to *any* of our student helmets if necessary, and had the potential to be programmed with any sequence of predetermined signals we devised.

We decided to keep it simple with a two-light system. A left light meant *turn left*. A right light meant *turn right*. Both lights, lit at the same time, meant *flare*. Voilà: elegant, intuitive, and Ops-compliant.

After some testing – in the form of various teammates being directed around the DZ on a push bike – we decided to change the colour of the lights for the flare. (The colour change made it more immediately obvious that both lights were on, as we discovered there was a slight bias to the left light after flying a left-hand pattern.) After that stage-one

testing, we took the system to the sky to check that the lights wouldn’t be a distraction in freefall – or prevent the student from checking her airspace whilst under canopy. We also designed and tested a backup plan using flags wielded on the ground – just in case.

#### THE COMMS

As skydiving instructors, we are constantly communicating with our students in all manner of ways, both verbal and non-verbal. It follows that, when working with a student who is deaf, I needed to rely heavily on non-verbal communication methods – body language, facial expressions – alongside my best efforts at BSL.

British Skydiving provided us the invaluable support of funding two BSL interpreters for the ground school day. Not only did these interpreters help me to convey all of the information and context to Paulina, it also allowed the two of us to build a solid rapport. Having the interpreters for the ground school was pivotal in creating a strong relationship for the rest of the course, and I managed to pick up some bits of BSL that would prove useful later in Paulina’s progression.

#### THE JUMPS

We managed to sneak in her Level 1 the day after GS, but then the weather came in and *stayed* in. It was a couple of weeks before the skies opened back up and Paulina was able to return, but any of our worries proved baseless: she absolutely *smashed* through the rest of her levels and consols. She completed them all within a week!

In the absence of the interpreters who had come in for GS, I had planned to use a BSL interpreter app for briefing and debriefing. I was delighted to discover that, with a little BSL and the tactical use of videos, we got on really well without it. It was fairly simple to confirm with Paulina that she understood what I had briefed because she could show me on the ground the skill I was teaching – and ultimately then showed me in the sky.

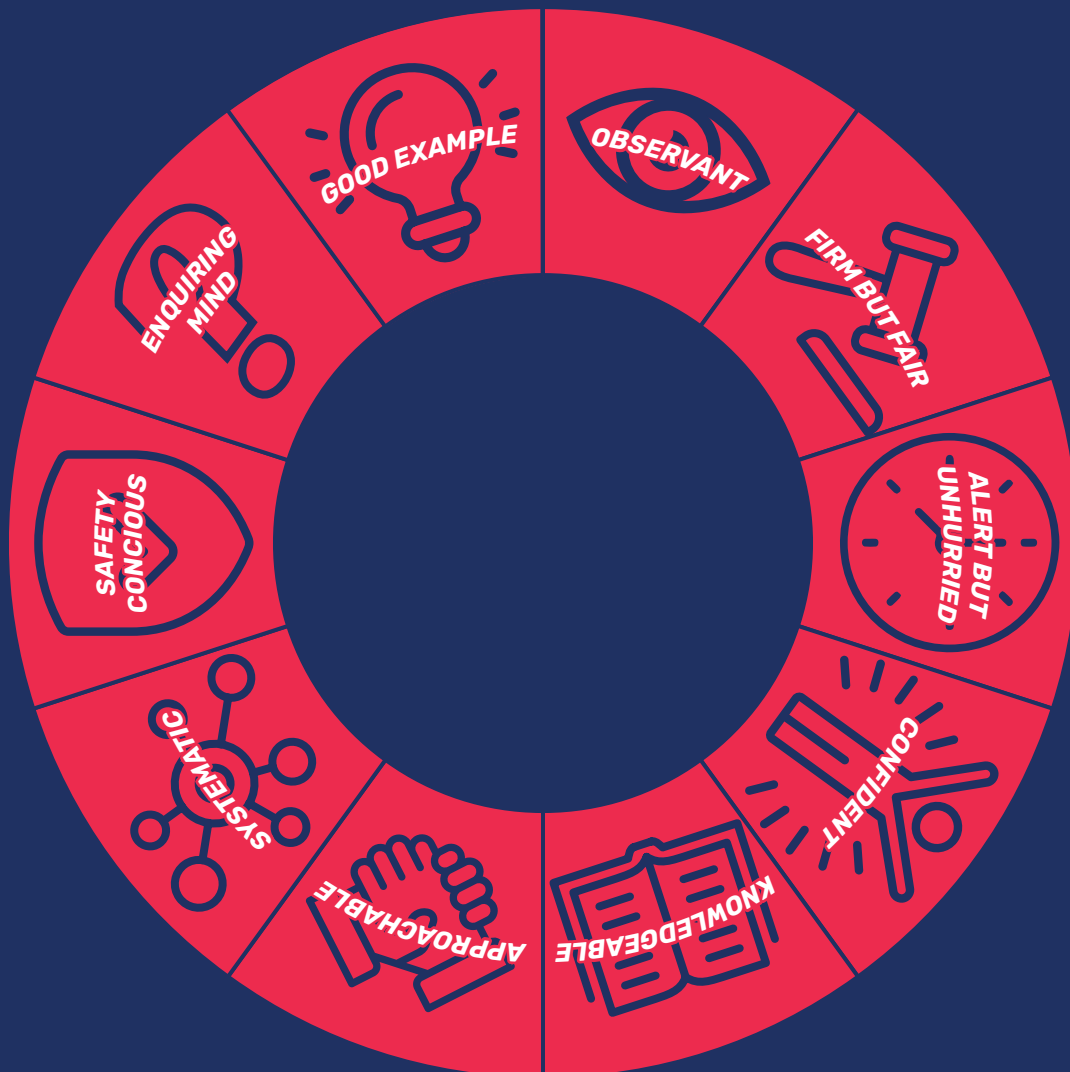
We used Joe and Alex’s light system to guide Paulina’s canopy descent on her first six levels, tapering down as Paulina gained more confidence with her canopy control. Although the simplicity of the system meant it was intuitive and easy-to-use, it did mean that some commands (such as “arms up”) weren’t available, meaning that we needed to place extra emphasis on these skills on the ground during brief and debriefs. Generous use of canopy props (and watching others land) proved extremely helpful here.

The process of teaching Paulina to skydive was a challenge, yes. But more to the point, it was an absolute *pleasure*. Paulina was very switched-on, and she took to the skies remarkably naturally. Although my BSL is very limited – I can do some finger spelling and some creative signing, but not much more than that – my very patient student could often connect the dots. You could say that the process was as instructive for me as it was for her, and **I want to encourage other instructors (and programmes) to consider reimaging what’s possible in this sport: who might we be leaving out that we can and should welcome in?**





# THE 10 QUALITIES OF A GOOD INSTRUCTOR ARE



## THE LASTING LESSONS

Part of becoming an instructor involves passing a written exam on your British Skydiving course. This requires you to have an in-depth knowledge of the Ops Manual, but that's not all you need. You also need to cultivate a solid understanding of the fundamentals of instructing as a skill in and of itself.

The latter can be split into two lists: firstly, the ten qualities of a good instructor; secondly, the eight principles of good instruction. It's common knowledge that passing the exam only requires that you come up with a handy acronym to memorise the lists and reel them off accurately for the test.

That said, if your goal is to be a *truly good* instructor, the exam isn't the endgame. Reflect on what it means to embody each of these skills – what they optimally look and feel like for *you*, in *your style*, for your students. No matter

what abilities your students may have, these skills will serve you – and them – incalculably well.

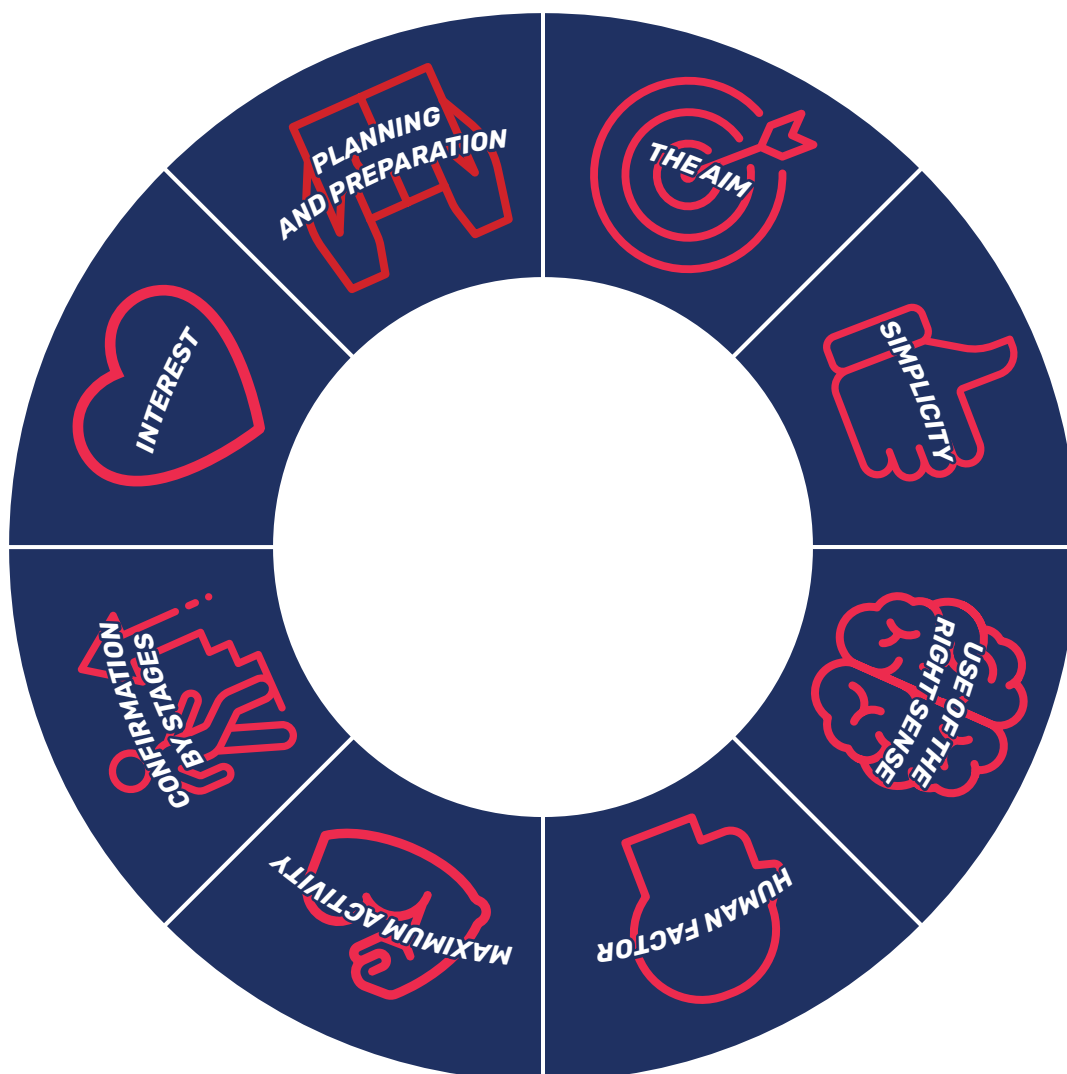
## THE FUTURE

This adventure with Paulina is only the beginning. Where I work, at Skydive Langar, **we're actively working to find ways to make the sport even more inclusive and accessible.**

For example: this year, two of our regular fun jumpers, Paul Rimmington and Ian Rayner, hosted "learn to sign" sessions. These three-part workshops had Paul and Ian teaching us everything from finger-spelling and colours to how to ask for a cup of tea. (We even managed to sneak in some specific skydiving terminology – but tea first, of course.)

By teaching our fun jumpers and staff some basic BSL, it's easier to communicate with the deaf members of our

# THE 8 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD INSTRUCTION ARE



Langar community, building deeper connections. It was fun to see the enthusiasm at these sessions and to watch the participants enjoy the opportunity to use what they have learnt. Since those workshops took place before Paulina was doing her AFF, it meant that the Langar staff and other fun jumpers were able to use BSL to chat to and encourage her. She was constantly greeted by grinning faces and hands fluttering: *How was your jump? What level are you on? Good luck!*

It was like a little ripple effect of inclusivity, and it really made me smile.

There are still plenty of things that are hard to access for deaf people: further training and progression; opportunities to be an instructor; safety days; even this article, because of how it is written.

**As instructors, adapting our communication for a given student doesn't *always* require big changes such as specially designed gear, changing how we do talk-down and having interpreters. However, we can – and, I would argue, should – always consider how we communicate with our students to set them up for success.**

Some students respond really well to a carefully explained mechanical understanding of how and why something works. Some students love metaphors. Some students struggle until they're given a different way to visualise something. This is where, as an instructor, having a rock-solid understanding of what you teach means you can have more flexibility in framing the information you need to deliver. At the end of the day, we are communicators. Never stop honing that craft.



# THE LONG

AFTER A TWO-DECADE HIATUS FROM SKYDIVING, ANTHONY EVE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE A LONG-HELD AMBITION

# WAY DOWN

It's bright at 41,000ft – diamond-bright, and diamond-cold. There's no warmth from the eye-narrowing bite of the sun's early rays. It's almost eerie.

Six of us are about to leave the relative warmth of a modified Piper Cheyenne 400LS aircraft: its metal walls; its landing gear; its safe supply of oxygen. The world outside that door is 54 degrees below freezing, and nearly airless.

I am keenly aware of that fact when crewmember Paul switches off the aircraft oxygen and, as part of the handover effect, it suddenly becomes almost impossible to exhale. We'd been warned about that alarming "HALO waterboard" – that it would only last a moment, and that it meant that it was officially time to get out into the big, bright, cold world outside the plane.

So I did.

Statistically speaking, most of the people who have done this are military Special Operators. I, myself, am a Project Management Consultant. I saw the Red Devils fly Paracommanders when I was four years old, and from that moment on, I knew this was vaguely where I was headed: great big, blue unknowns. I managed to make a go of it when I was 18, convincing a friend (who, wouldn't you know it, bailed) to join me for a static line. I went gamely ahead and, as it turns out, an ex-Red Devil taught me to jump. I, of course, loved it.

Then I got married. And I had kids. I was building a career in aviation and engineering (British Airlines, Airbus...you get

the picture), and balancing everything life was throwing at me. Around 185 jumps in, I stopped taking the parachute out of the cupboard. I still looked up at any blue sky with the intent to visit, but life was officially in the way.

It took me 25 years to get back.

Suddenly, I was 50. I had been 32 when I put it away. Since then, the kids had grown up and left the nest, leaving disposable income and free time in their wake, and the career I built had served me well. I live less than an hour from Dunkes, and after ticking off AFF Levels three and five – plus five consolidation jumps – I was right back where I'd left off. After some FS coaching, I had my D-licence (under the grandfather system). Before I knew it, another couple of hundred jumps had gone by. I started to realise, one day, that there was nothing left standing in the way of that bucket-list item I'd always wanted.

I had an idea. And I had so far to go: an ocean and half a continent on the X axis, as it turns out, and more than 40,000ft on the Y.

I saw my first HALO (High Altitude, Low Opening) jump in May 1973, when John Noakes, from the children's *Blue Peter* programme, did a jump with oxygen from 25,000ft with the RAF Falcons. *I'd like to do that*, I thought, and put it on the back burner.

HALO jumps have been technically possible since the 1950s, but they've historically been conducted by the military. Sure, some civilian higher-altitude jumps have been ticked off as "special projects", but these have generally involved



resources not available to most of us. In recent years, greater demand has resulted in wider availability, albeit still with the risks of hypoxia, decompression sickness and hypothermia. It also comes with one *heck* of a feeling of adventure and accomplishment.

I wanted that.

Adventure, after all, is why I skydive. I'm not a formation kinda guy. I tend to jump on my own. I just like leaving the aircraft, watching it fly away, opening my canopy at five grand and enjoying the ride down. I've travelled extensively to skydive: Greece; Switzerland; Canada; Thailand; all around the UK. Wherever I go, for work or for play, I try to engineer a way to sneak a jump in.

And now, I wanted this one: a "true" HALO jump, from as far up as they'd let me.

My initial research identified fewer than a handful of potential operators, all of which were in the States. Most of them ended up being red herrings. After many unanswered emails, I came across West Tennessee Skydiving. Bingo! There was a 41,000ft jump option. After a flurry of emails, I had a date in my diary: 1st July, 2023.

Game on.

My plan was to arrive a few days earlier, get familiar with the dropzone, receive the required formal training, conduct the practice jump on Friday 30th June and make the jump itself a little after dawn on Saturday 1st July. As I crossed the late-summer Atlantic on the way to Tennessee, my window-gazing thoughts were riveted to the idea that we were at cruising altitude *below* my soon-to-be exit altitude.

When I arrived, I met the team.

There were three of us skydivers making the jump: myself, Jithin Vijayan, from India, and Aaron Smith, a travelling wingsuiter from Florida. We would be joined by Thomas (who was leading the training and monitoring the O<sub>2</sub> equipment on the flight), Paul (also training, monitoring O<sub>2</sub> and dispatching, but not jumping), Tyler (who would remove and

stow the door), Alex (also training and doing checks) and Mike (the legendary DZO of West Tennessee, who would fly the plane himself).

The formal training was, predictably, unsettling.

My biggest hesitancy going into the jump was the oxygen system. As the training progressed, I soon had more to bite my nails about than just the O<sub>2</sub>. Past 28,000 ASL, I learned that I needed to be worried about decompression sickness. I learned that I would have to force myself to breathe out into the system, as the pressure would push against it. I learned that landing off in a cornfield meant that my life would be at risk: not due to grumpy farmers' firearms, but due to the 150-degree heat trapped in the crop. I would have about 10-15 minutes before I'd succumb to heat exhaustion.

I knew from the start that I wanted to use as much of my own gear for the jump as possible. By the time we learned about death-by-cornfield, I was glad I'd already removed so many variables from what felt like a growing pile of known unknowns.

We drilled the procedures again, and again, and again. The act of the jump itself was orders of magnitude simpler than the gear required for us to get there. We had as much access to the plane as we wanted, to familiarise ourselves with the layout and how to exit. That said, between the absence of air molecules up there and the aircraft's tiny door, there was really only one method available: just... fall out.

Time for a 15,000ft run-through to kick the tyres.

We taxied out of the hangar, straight onto the runway, and took off. We were at the desired altitude in under five minutes.

I ended up breathing my personal oxygen supply all the way down to the ground. (I *really* wanted to get used to the breathing.) We all landed, safely avoiding the cornfield, conducted a debrief of the jump and discussed potential emergencies (the worst being a reserve out at 41,000ft).



## / THE LONG WAY DOWN

Then, on a hot, stuffy Southern morning before dawn, it was time for the event itself.

What little sleep we were able to get was compounded by the need to be at the dropzone for 04:30 (which meant a 02:30 start for me). Luckily, jet lag was working in my favour.

There was a quiet, reserved mood as we slowly kitted up, FAI-issued Flysights and all. We did a final checklist run-through. We exchanged best wishes with loved ones.

Finally, we boarded the aircraft and connected to the aircraft oxygen supply. We were fitted with our bailout kits, as well as heart rate and motion sensors under our gloves. (The information was displayed on a screen above our heads so we could monitor our O<sub>2</sub> saturation and pulse rate.) There, in the breeze of a portable air conditioner nozzle pushed into the plane, we sat silently through the sixty minutes of required O<sub>2</sub> pre-breathing required to stave off decompression sickness. *What am I doing?*, I kept wondering. *What am I doing?*

At sixty minutes, Mike spun 'er up and, just like that, we took off. We passed 32,000ft in just 15 minutes.

At 41,000ft, it was time for the final run-in. Paul gave us the three-minute warning to position our goggles and turn on our cameras. Tyler opened and stowed the door. I moved to the exit. Paul turned on my personal O<sub>2</sub> bottles and disconnected the aircraft supply. I crouched there for a moment – very much in the 'bail-out' situation I signed up for – and I got the nod.

*“This is something I’ve waited a lifetime for”*

*This is something I’ve waited a lifetime for, I remember thinking as I looked out into the endless nothing.*

I fall. I tumble. And tumble, and tumble, and tumble, and no matter what I do I *cannot* get stable, during which time my brain registers that the air is too thin to do anything else. I notice the twin engine contrails streaking out behind the aircraft, and have the twinkle of a thought that I’ve never seen contrails behind an aircraft I’ve just departed.

At 39,000ft, I’m stable. My breathing is regular. I can *just* see out of the top of my frozen-over goggles. I do a 360 and enjoy the surreal ride, occasionally glancing down at my altimeter. After what feels like ages, I notice that I’m still at 36,000ft, and the ground looks as far away as it did at the top. Some time passes, and I check the altitude again; I’m just passing through 30k. I check again at 25k, relaxing a little at the fact that any O<sub>2</sub> issues will be less emergent now. By 15.5k – still above a height I normally see – I feel like I’ve been falling forever. With 12k behind me, I’m suddenly wrapped in what feels like warmth – really, just the absence of the tomblike cold above it – and I stretch out for a little practice pull. At 5,500ft, I deploy, do my canopy checks, remove the now-demisted goggles (and claustrophobic mask), turn off the personal O<sub>2</sub> bottle and look for the airfield. It’s right beneath my feet. (Nice one, Mike.)

I land. I finally, actually *land*. I gather up my canopy and walk over to my colleagues (except for Aaron, who has landed his wingsuit in a backyard 15 miles away). I call my wife, ecstatic, as the FAI judge confirms it: we had accomplished multiple State, Country and Continental records – Exit Altitude; Distance Fallen Without a Drogue. My personal exit altitude was recorded at 43,264ft using GPS (41,000ft barometric) and Distance Fallen Without a Drogue at 37,765ft. I was in freefall for 2.5 minutes and achieved speeds in excess of 200mph.

My heartfelt thanks go to Mike, Thomas, Paul, Alex, Tyler, Mike the Mechanic and all the others at West Tennessee who made us feel so welcome and supported. I also thank my fellow jumpers, Aaron and Jithin; FAI Judge and Observer Scott; UK NAC member Craig; my home club, Skydive Buzz; and my beloved wife, Jacqui, for bearing with me at a distance. Blue skies.







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# SUMMER ON WHEELS

BRITONS OUT OF BRITAIN  
*Words and images by  
Joel Strickland*





**A** relatively high proportion of the skydiving industry representatives you might encounter at boogies, skills camps and competitions around Europe are British. While primarily we are sent out into the world to fly the flag for our respective equipment manufacturers of various other countries, we are also members, both personally and professionally, of the UK skydiving community. We can be easily found at these affairs – most intensely when all present together – Britishing hard.

In purely fundamental terms, a dropzone is nothing more than a representation of the ability to get up into the air and back down again. Everything else is of variable importance, depending on who you are and what you want. A home dropzone with a strong and supportive community can be a profoundly important thing to a person, but there is perhaps as much that can be said for getting out there and experiencing some other operations, because there are all shapes and sizes to be had.



*“Touring is a chance to experience, interact, and share the lessons and experiences of the sport as a whole”*

Touring many dropzones every year offers a rarefied perspective upon the building blocks of how skydiving operates from one place to another. It is a chance to experience, interact, and – most importantly – to share the lessons and experiences of the sport as a whole. Perhaps the most important role that we, the “tent people”, occupy is that out on the road we represent the companies we work with, but when we return home, we represent the skydiving communities we have spent time with along the way.

We encounter other Britons as we go, most frequently those committed to a role in the industry, who are also directly or indirectly doing their bit for British Skydiving. Some are long since gone from Old Blighty, yet no matter how long you spend away, you can never really shake off the Britishness. Others are forging their way anew, enthusiastically bouncing around to this gig and that; more still can be found at their regular overseas gathering, developing and refining their corner of the sport year upon year.

Bigways get a good showing, with the British sector's assorted dramas most often a little quieter than others. There are also the few times a year when the swoop riffraff get to visit a pond somewhere, and dutifully line up along the edge of proceedings to support one another by casually ribbing all and sundry – a time-honoured method of perplexing Europeans and Americans in equal measure.

More so every year, many places recognise the value of being able to offer an Innhopp into somewhere snazzy. On tour, we are lucky to be able to experience more than most, and although the highlights and stories are almost always worth sharing, the experiences themselves are often a thoroughly mixed bag. When the summer starts to wind down, we are always glad to be home.

You may get to land on a beach at sunset where an old-timey jazz band are playing songs from *The Jungle Book*, but for every awesome surprise there is an opposite logistical farce, where you get to be abandoned without your stuff in the middle of nowhere. It is a pleasure to report that two of the most fun from this season have been arranged and executed here, at home, in jolly old England.



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"I was 19, broke, unemployed and sold my girlfriend's canopy for, er, party supplies... so I thought I better sew her a new one!" What a sentence! What a story. This describes the humble yet outrageous beginnings of NZ Aerosports, home of Icarus Canopies, in the words of our founder, himself.

From getting a paratrooper toy from his Mum, watching parachutes at the DZ as a 6-year-old, and jumping off the wharf with a parachute made from bedsheets, to doing his first jump at 16, sewing his first canopy on a borrowed machine at 19, and starting to sell parachutes out of a garage in 1986, Paul "Jyro" Martyn had an undying love for the sky.

In the time Jyro created and ran the Icarus Canopies brand, until he passed away in 2017, he pushed everything he had to its limits. We miss him – and we always will.

JYRO is the next generation of NZ Aerosports. It honours our founder, of course, because it was the name we all knew him by. But JYRO, the rebrand, also marks the start of a new chapter: our next jump.

JYRO is the space between sound and silence, art and science, chaos and calm. JYRO is a state of epic tranquillity that transcends understanding. It's that moment – in the door, in freefall, mid-swoop – where nothing but the present exists: a perfect balance of euphoria and thrill.

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NZ Aerosports. Icarus Canopies. Now JYRO. We design and make the canopies that take you right to the edge of your world. Because that's where the F&%\$ Yeah! moments live.

Others have tried to copy us. Some even claimed names that sounded mighty bloody familiar. But there's a drive and a passion to our radically authentic ways of doing sh!t that others can't touch. We never back down from being ourselves. We follow our dreams, passions, and the line we want to fly on our canopy – in business, and in life. Most of all, we're always looking for the fun to be had.

JYRO is a community. We flirt with boundaries, which is why we welcome all who feel at home with having no limits. Our fetish is flight. Flight is sexy, it's beautiful, it's captivating and it's wild. We share the love – with our pilots, with our athletes, with all cultures, colours and genders – with all canopy types.

Maybe you've only done one jump. Maybe you're a seasoned pilot. Maybe you're an adventurer, wanderer, or a weekend warrior. Perhaps you're an athlete, even a world champion. Welcome.

In the years ahead, JYRO will push all of us to new places. Our goal is to redefine where and what it means to fly. To find the purest, wildest flight.

As Jyro himself would say, "Let's conquer the world". That drive has seen us set world records, make history, create classic canopies like the Safire and Crossfire, and make breakthroughs like Petra that have introduced pilots everywhere to the hyper-performance wing.

If there's a way to use a wing to defy gravity, WE'LL FIND IT.

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# FREA CREATU

THE BALTIC WINGSUIT MEET 2023 -  
WŁOCWŁEK, POLAND





# KY RES







If you're the kind of skydiver who likes to wear ram-air, there was but one place to be this past August: Skydive.Pl, near Włoczek. The lucky 30+ skydivers who missioned out to Poland for the week-long event made more than six hundred collective jumps (notably, without a single cutaway in the bunch) and – well – made it look really, really good.

Sure, the weather was changeable, but that only gave the meet a little extra sauce. Moody skies played backdrop to smaller, more dynamic flocks – and full Caravan loads flew ever-tighter formations around some of the most impressive cloud backdrops we've seen.

As to the vibe? Chef's kiss. According to Andy Ford, it felt like revisiting a boogie of the past. "Like the 90s and 2000s," he smiles, "when everyone gathered to enjoy a beer and some laughter at the end of the day's shenanigans."

**LOAD ORGANISERS:**

**Piotr Wasalek  
Christian Bush  
Pär Sofstrom  
Daniel Culbertson**

**CAMERA FLYERS:**

**Andy Ford  
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SOPHIE SMITHELLS PROVES MENTAL STRENGTH IS AN ESSENTIAL QUALITY FOR A WORLD RECORD ATTEMPT  
*Words: Sophie Smithells*  
*Photos: Ewan Cowie and Norman Kent*



# PROJECT 19

## THE JOURNEY TO A WORLD RECORD





## / PROJECT 19

**D**id you know that votes for women in America eventually passed due to one man in Tennessee changing his mind at the last moment, thanks to a letter from his mother? 2022 was a challenging year for women's rights: *Roe vs. Wade* being overturned in the US, women in Iran fighting for the right to feel the wind in their hair, the erosion of women's rights in Afghanistan...and so many other challenges faced by women on a daily basis.

When Project 19 was announced in 2019, I saw it as an excellent opportunity not only to show the world what women are capable of, and to inspire others to live bold, bright lives – but to progress my own skills where I was least confident. I had no expectations to be invited to the record at the time. Instead, I wanted to challenge myself to pursue a goal well outside of my comfort zone.

### *P19 TRAINING AND WARM-UP CAMPS*

Project 19 had a fantastic approach to training and building skills and confidence. They started out by organising smaller regional events to build skill sets in smaller groups. Meanwhile, other Load Organisers started putting on skills camps around Europe and in the UK to help prepare for the upcoming records.

Due to the association with Project 19, these camps had a great diversity of attendees. Over the course of three such events, I started building friendships across the European Vertical big-way scene. I really felt I was beginning to progress, and actually considered the possibility of trying out for Project 19...but then? COVID. I had to work *hard* afterwards to get back to where I was after a stellar 2019.

By May of 2022, I decided to take the plunge and try out at the 72-way camp in Klatovy. Somehow, against any expectations I had, I was awarded a slot on Project 19!

I found out my slot a week beforehand: last diver, right right trail and stinging on a bridge pod. I was nervous, to say the least; I prefer second stinger in general, as I struggle with leg burble, but the challenge was set.







### THE EVENT

I arrived at Eloy on Saturday, a day early, to at least get a few practice jumps in and get to know the dropzone. On Sunday, only the base of eight were officially jumping. Everyone else was free to do warm-up jumps. Briefings kicked off in the afternoon. It was the first time I had ever been in a room with that many female skydivers. The energy was fantastic. The Project 19 team, led by Amy Chmelecki and Sara Curtis, left everyone feeling very empowered and unified in our goal for the week. This was going to be a staged process, focusing on building confidence and stability in the formation.

On Sunday night, there was a last-minute slot change. I was moved to second stinger in the bridge pod. (Phew!)

### MONDAY

For the inner 40, the day was filled with practice jumps to build on the training they'd already done. (Incredibly, this 40-way had been able to train in Abu Dhabi's 32ft wind tunnel, so had already spent time practising the centre of the formation.) We outer pods started with a tunnel session, rotating with our cross pod, followed up with single-plane jumps. It was a great way to meet the others and start our journey together.

### TUESDAY

The fun began. For the first time, all 100 women were jumping together. The inner 40 built consistently, but the outer 60 were first tasked with learning the visuals of the approach, getting on level and in slot. The organisers strictly enforced a no-docking rule at first, and then built it up in waves throughout the day. This was drilled not only in the sky, but over multiple dirt dives.

### WEDNESDAY

Building on the jumps from Tuesday, the inner 60 were progressively allowed to dock. By the end of day, my pod had built with its stinger on. Other pods, however, experienced challenges, so a few changes were made to help solve them.

### THURSDAY

Thanksgiving was upon us, and so was the wind. We managed one jump in freezing conditions before jumping was called. It offered a break for everyone and a chance to learn more about the historical drivers behind the project – alongside the celebration of the 19th Amendment anniversary in the US.

### FRIDAY

We started jumping again with renewed energy. The formation was reduced to a 72-way (to break the previous record of 65 and "bank" a world record). I was lucky enough to have kept my slot.

It was a bittersweet jump. Although we broke the record and held it for 10 seconds, some very talented friends weren't on it. We increased to an 80-way for jump two and proceeded to break our second record of the day.

I have to admit, I was starting to feel the pressure. After performing well all day, I went up on that last jump feeling mentally fatigued – and my worst anxieties came true. I fumbled the dock, panicked, burbled myself and flew into the pod behind me before bailing to my belly. (Kudos to Rosie Manning for holding her pod together after I almost took her out!) I landed with a heavy heart, and only a slight feeling of relief that at least the pressure was off.



## / PROJECT 19

After all, I thought: I was now a world record holder, at least for the time being.

### SATURDAY

I was very surprised to see my name still on the slot for the 101-way attempts the next day. Jump one on Saturday was the most challenging jump of my life. Trying to clean the slate after the epic oopsie of my last jump was the biggest mental challenge I have ever faced in skydiving.

Somehow, I managed to keep my demons at bay and get on with it. I even enjoyed a smile with my cross partner Hannah Parker, eagerly willing me on from across the other side of the formation. With every jump, we came closer to the goal. At one point, we had a formation with 98 people docked: only three missing.

On jump five they decided to reduce the formation to a 97-way. This was *the* jump. You could feel the excited, nervous energy as we went to the planes. The jump felt fantastic, the bridge and our stingers, looking across the formation I could see Hannah's pod and stingers all built. There were a lot of smiling faces when we landed, and one question was on everyone's mind: *had we done it?*

It was a nail-biting wait of over an hour as the judges scoured the footage. Then, the news: no. We were *one frame away* from a 97-way world record. Unfortunately, one lady was just a tiny bit late to the party, and one left a little too enthusiastically on the first beep of her audible. We tried one more time, but it ended up being the 80-way record that we walked away with.

I left the event exhausted, but so proud. I felt privileged to be invited, and to get to spend a week with so many amazing women from around the world. The journey of Project 19 taught me a lot about perseverance – and the importance of mental strength in skydiving. It was an amazing event. I'm looking forward to continuing my head-down journey for years to come.



## PROJECT 19 RATIONALE

**The original mission of the Women's Skydiving Network (WSN)'s Project 19 was to build a 100-way Women's "Vertical" (head-down) World Record in 2020 to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment. This was the amendment to the US Constitution that gave women the right to vote.**

**As COVID-19 spread, the mission was put on hold. But in November 2022 the women from 22 countries came together to try and beat the all-women 65-way world record set in 2016. Led by professional skydivers Sara Curtis and Amy Chmelecki, who were instrumental in securing the 2016 record, the team has an average of 10 years each in the sport and 150,000 jumps among them.**

**Roughly a century ago, a wave of women's rights spread slowly across the globe, beginning with the right to vote. The right to own property, control personal wealth and even control one's own body continues to be challenged in many areas of the world, including the United States.**

**Lack of representation and equality impact nearly every aspect of women's lives and the sport of skydiving is no exception, with only 14% of US skydivers identifying as female, according to the United States Parachute Association (USPA). As such, Project 19 has grown to be more than a celebration of the 19th Amendment, but a celebration of women's rights and issues worldwide.**



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WEEKLY NEWS.  
23.3.85

# Breathtaking para plunge

FIONA THORBURN'S first free-parachute jump was a rather chummy affair—she left the air with her two instructors hanging tightly to an arm and a leg each. District nurse Fiona plummeted feet with her instructors, who let her go the instant before she plummeted.

The startling training technique of a new free-fall parachuting course originated in America and is now being taught through Slipstream Adventures.

## Hand signals

"I'd always wanted to learn to parachute but conventional training takes a long time," said 25-year-old Fiona Thorburn. "This new course gives me the experience of free-falling as if I were one of the five ordinary parachutists who leave the aircraft at 10,000 feet with their instructors hanging on to their arms and legs."

# SKY-DIVING FIRST HELD NO TERROR FOR FIONA!



A high-flying Strathkelvin girl became a skydiving pioneer recently when she made British parachuting history by taking part in an exciting new training routine 10,000 feet above ground. Fiona Thorburn, a 25-year-old district nurse, became the first person in Britain to try an accelerated free-fall programme, which involved her in jumping out of a plane — with two instructors hanging on!

By BILLY HANNAH

And, making it an historic Strathkelvin "double", one of the instructors was, like Fiona herself, from Kirriemuir.

He is Ian Aitken, originally from Broomhill, Kirriemuir, who is now a full-time instructor with the Headcorn Parachute Club in Kent where the new training programme is in operation.

The basic concept of the programme is that the student, when they leave the plane holding on to their instructor, can study his or her every move in the breath-taking 45 seconds it takes to free-fall from 10,000 feet to 4000 feet before opening parachute and gliding down to earth.

do five conventional parachute drops and successfully complete eight hours of intensive training on the ground.

The aim of accelerated free-fall — it's known as AFF for short — is to speed up the normal training procedure so that students can progress to free-fall sooner than they would under conventional training.

"It would usually take a student 90 conventional jumps before being allowed to use a square parachute for free-fall," Fiona said. "But do it after only one or two jumps and you can do it after much less than that."

Fiona fulfilled a life-long ambition when she took part in the new course you can do it after much less than that."

SPEED UP





# HISTORY IN THE MAKING

## FIONA CROWHURST'S JOURNEY TO BECOMING THE UK'S FIRST AFF STUDENT *As told to Jackie Smith*

In the autumn of 1984, Fiona Crowhurst (née Thorburn) travelled 400 miles from Scotland to Slipstream Adventures at Headcorn. She made the long drive to support her sister, Elspeth, who was bound and determined to make a jump. As it turns out, that rather heroic show of sisterhood led to a particularly proud moment in skydiving history. Here's how.

Over those hours on the ground at the dropzone, Fiona – no doubt helped along by her enormous grin and infectious enthusiasm – managed to make friends with all the local skydivers. Egged on by her new friends (and, of course, Elspeth), it wasn't long before she took to the skies herself. Fiona made her first static-line jump on October 21, 1984. She, perhaps unsurprisingly, nailed it, and continued merrily through the then-standard BPA Category System, completing five static-line jumps.

On the day of that fifth static-line, Fiona just happened to be within earshot when Brian Dyas mentioned that he was on the hunt for a skydiver to participate in a special project. Slipstream Adventures had been set up as the UK's first AFF school at Headcorn Airfield, with Brian Dyas and Ian Aitken as Instructors. Brian was looking that day for someone with at least five static-line jumps – and who was willing to do a new type of progression training called "Accelerated Free Fall". (At that time, the BPA was reluctant to allow anyone without static-line jump experience to kick the tyres of the new progression.)

Fiona bopped right up to Brian and declared that not only did she qualify, she was more than up for it. She commenced her AFF ground school that very same day.

It was, however, nearly Halloween – not a terribly amenable season for the enterprise. Due to the British winter weather (and the fact that she lived 400 miles away), she had to wait a while. On the bitterly frosty morning of January 27, 1985, Fiona finally wriggled into a Chaser, packed with a 360sqft tandem canopy and sporting a belly-band pull-out system. Fiona, Brian and Ian piled into Headcorn's BN Islander, "Bertie" – with no in-flight door, and outside temperatures of -250C – and headed up to 10k.

"The jump was *amazing*," Fiona remembers. "I had been warned that I would experience sensory overload – and I did, for the first six or seven seconds [of freefall] – and then again at 7,000ft. Brian and Ian gave me a shake at 5,000ft. No wonder the jump passed quickly!"

After Fiona's triumphant stand-up landing, all three skydivers – plus the welcome committee on the ground – were on a hugging, hollering high. British skydiving history had been made – and women's skydiving history had been made, too.

Somewhere, Tiny Broadwick was smiling.

Fiona stayed in the sport for ten years. She married fellow skydiver Dave Crowhurst in 1986. They had two "DZ kids" together: Graham and Colin. Both of the couple's sons went on to do their own tandem jumps at Headcorn.

"Skydiving was a big part of my life for a decade. I wouldn't have missed it for the world," Fiona grins. "I am very privileged."

*"I had been warned that I would experience sensory overload - and I did, for the first six or seven seconds of freefall - and then again at 7,000ft. No wonder the jump passed quickly!"*



# THE YEAR







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