

Fearless Felix

Supersonic skydiver breaks world records



- 1 Standing at the edge of space above the deserts of New Mexico, Felix Baumgartner paused. It was a small step away from his capsule, but a 24-mile drop back down to Earth. “Our guardian angel will take care of you,” said mission control, and the man known as Fearless Felix jumped. Ten heart-stopping minutes later the Austrian landed back on Earth, after reaching speeds of up to 725mph, and breaking three world records, including becoming the world’s fastest supersonic skydiver by breaking the sound barrier.
- 2 Baumgartner raised his arms in a victory salute to thank his team. “We love you Felix,” cheered the control room as his mother, Ava, wept. He was wearing a special survival suit that had kept his body intact against the hugely varying 14 during his drop back to Earth. Without it, the crushing forces would have caused his blood to boil and his lungs to explode.
- 3 Baumgartner later told a press conference: “When I was standing there high above the earth, you become so humble, you don’t think about breaking records.” He admitted all he could think about was getting back alive, but added: “Sometimes you have to go up really high to see how small you are.”
- 4 As he reached the desired height, Baumgartner went through a checklist of 40 items with his mentor, Joe Kittinger, the previous record holder. There was some concern that a heater for his visor was not working, causing it to fog. “This is very serious, Joe,” he told Kittinger. “Sometimes it’s getting foggy when I exhale ... I do not feel heat.” But they decided to go ahead, watched by a record 8 million people as the jump was streamed live on YouTube. The journey upwards, during which the

curvature of the Earth became visible and the skies gradually turned black, took two and a half hours. The return trip was rather more rapid.

5 Three cameras attached to Baumgartner's suit recorded his freefall of just over four minutes – which failed to break the existing freefall record for duration – and then the parachute opening. The success of the mission, and of the suit, raises the prospect that astronauts might be able to survive a high altitude disaster of the type that struck the Space Shuttle Columbia in 2003, by bailing out. Baumgartner's top medical man in the stunt was Dr Jonathan Clark, whose wife, Laurel, died in the Columbia accident. Clark is now dedicated to improving astronauts' chances of survival.

6 Baumgartner has made a name for himself with acts of daring. The former paratrooper has parachuted off buildings and mountains and once into a 182 metre deep cave. He was chasing five records yesterday: the first human to break the sound barrier in freefall; the highest freefall altitude jump; the highest manned balloon flight; and longest freefall which he failed to beat; and his jump platform is believed to be the largest manned balloon in history.

7 Baumgartner said the most exciting moment for him had been when he was standing outside the capsule "on top of the world". He added: "The most beautiful moment was when I was standing on the landing area and Mike Todd [the life support engineer who dressed Baumgartner in his suit] showed up and he had a smile on his face like a little kid." Earlier, Todd had told the press conference: "The world needs a hero right now, and they got one in Felix Baumgartner."

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