The Skydiving Experience

The thrill of skydiving is beyond any possible description. Falling at 120 mph with the wind screaming past your body is an unbelievable experience of total freedom. The sport is not without an element of danger; indeed, it is this fear that makes it so addictive. Yet there are relatively few serious injuries in this activity because of the tight regulations and safety requirements mandated for skydiving and parachuting organisations.

I still recall my first jump from 2,500 feet using what is called a static line. **37** The static line system is often used for those new to the sport. It is a means of helping them to deal with the sensation of falling, while ensuring that they will not actually hit anything.

38 Still, there seems to be a little slice of missing time from the point where I let go of the aircraft to the parachute canopy actually opening. Pure terror sometimes does that! It was a moment where time ceased to exist, not quite a total blackout but still quite strange. Two days of training on the ground, the ceaseless drill of counting out "one thousand, two thousand, three thousand" and about all I seem to recall when I let go is something like "aaaaahhhhhh". After a second and many subsequent jumps, this sensation soon faded to a dim recollection as I became accustomed to falling.

The first real free fall commenced at about the fifth jump. This simply involved letting go of the aircraft and immediately deploying the canopy. **39** Starting from three seconds (let go and pull the ripcord) to five seconds (let go, count to three then pull the ripcord) increasing to seven seconds and so on. Once I made it to ten seconds and beyond, it became important to use an altimeter.

Free fall became really interesting at the 15-second mark because that is when the real training started. Turning, tumbling and rocketing forward by using different body positions put a completely new challenge before me. I learned it was possible to put my body in a position where forward ground speed was around 80 mph with an increase of downward velocity close to 200 mph - the ears tend to get a little warm! It is also quite important to flare out, slow and adopt a more stable position before deploying the canopy. Doing so at really high velocity really hurts, and I suspect everyone does this at least once. It is quite a lot of stress on your body when pulling up from 120 mph to 10 mph in about two or three seconds. **40**

One of my most fearful experiences occurred when I made a complete mess of trying to do a reverse tumble and became wildly unstable. Nothing I did seemed to correct the spinning and rolling, I was still at 5,000 feet and in desperation I deployed the canopy. **41** The bag wrapped around one of my legs. Luckily, by this time I had enough free fall experience to have the presence of mind to see what was happening and it was not too difficult to reach down and disentangle the risers. I also knew there was plenty of time to correct the problem because I was far higher than the standard 2,500 deployment altitude. It turned out fine in the end.

I would say one of my most memorable free falling experiences was above the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia. **42** From this altitude, I did some nice slow turns and drank in the scenery of Port Phillip Bay, out to sea, across the length of the peninsula to the city of Melbourne, all in an orange-red glow of the most amazing sunset I can ever remember. It was incredible.

Escaneado con CamScanner LIVEWORKSHEETS

A. There are few other ways to experience the total and utter freedom of flight.

B. This is a strong nylon tape that is attached to the aircraft on one end, and to the release pin of the jumper's canopy on the other.

C. I think my ears are still ringing from that mistake.

D. Altitudes increased gradually, as did time in free-fall.

E. It was a 40-second fall from 14,000 feet, right at sunset.

F. What happened next was not good at all.

G. My first experience is still very sharp in my memory.

LIVEWORKSHEETS