



## THE COCA-COLA DOME **EXTREME EXPERIENCE**

— MARK MANSFIELD —

THEY ARE CALLED BY VARIOUS NAMES, PARACHUTISTS, SKY DIVERS AND OF COURSE MY FAVOURITE, 'MEAT BOMBS'. WHY DO THEY JUMP OUT OF A PERFECTLY WORKING AEROPLANE IS OF COURSE BEYOND ME, BUT I SUPPOSE IT IS THE SAME DEBATE THAT FIXED-WING PILOTS HAVE WITH HELICOPTER PILOTS AND VICE-VERSA.

### THE WORLD OF SKY DIVING

Sky diving has various disciplines; you have normal sky divers, instructional sky divers, show jumping, demo jumping as well as competitive jumping. What has caught my interest is the world of the show jumpers. Show jumping is different to normal jumping, in that there are currently eighteen recognized CAA approved drop zones around the country. Show jumping is a discipline within sky diving that entails jumping into unapproved drop zones, such as stadiums, low altitude deploys and school fields. These all need to be approved by the CAA before such a jump can go ahead.

### AERIAL FX AND GRAHAM FIELD

Aerial FX was started by Graham Field and is one of three show jump organizations in the country and is the A-Team of parachute display organizations. Graham has been sky diving for over twenty years, has accumulated over 4 000 jumps. His CV includes Jump Master, Instructor and he has competed in two World championships. He came first in the non full-time team section and fifth overall. What drove Graham to sky diving? Well it was a dare in a bar that got him going.

Aerial FX consists of professionally rated, highly experienced and talented fun jumpers, coaches, instructors, Springbok team members from previous disciplines, current and previous gold medal winners in various disciplines that are specifically selected through various sky diving clubs and competitions who generally look for any excuse to jump into an event and test their skills. Show jumping requires stringent criteria that have to be met. To qualify for show jumps you need to be approved by the Parachuting Association of South Africa and the Association of Drop Zone Operators as well as have

CAA approval for each show jump. On top of this, a pro rating is required as well as a C license is needed for show jumps.

### SHOW JUMPING

The discipline of show jumping lies within the fact that each drop zone is different and comes with its own set of challenges. With this uniqueness, the Coca-Cola Dome at Northgate became a very attractive drop zone, due to its shape and is a well known landmark and reporting point for Lanseria International Airport. Graham has always wanted to land on top of The Dome and has taken five years to achieve this.

### PREPARATION FOR THE DOME JUMP

Before the jump could take place, permission had to be obtained from the Sasol Pension Fund (The Dome owners), Coca-Cola South Africa and The Dome management. Mike Rumble, owner of FullHouse Imaging whose office is based in The Dome was instrumental in the organizing of The Dome jump. Mike is also a highly qualified show jumper and is part of the Aerial FX team. Once all the paper work was in place, written permission from the Association of Drop Zone Operators was given and Aerial FX received clearance for the jump. They only had a two day window. The planned date for the jump was 26 April 2006, which coincided with the Castrol Xtreme Auto Show. Before the time, Graham and Mike climbed to the top of The Dome to check the condition of the roof, including the surface, cables, light poles, slope. The out area or run-off and the approach angles were discussed. Ground crew briefings were held and a full plan of action was implemented, with regards to the safety aspect of the jump, the prevailing weather conditions and the placement of the ground crew.

## THE BIG DAY

On the morning of the jump at 05h45, the outside air temperature was around ten degrees Celsius, with a slight Northwesterly wind. The CAA permit was approved and the land owner's permission had been obtained and The Dial Direct e-NewsCopter was on standby. A weather call was made and text messages were sent to alert every one to the fact that the show jumpers were actually about to land parachutes on the roof of The Dome. A final briefing was held with the ground crew as well as the paramedics who were on standby for the jump. The briefing included the emergency procedures, wind direction was taken into account for the approach and the ground crew revised their action plan. Graham and Mike made the final call for all systems go.

On arrival at Lanseria Airport, Carl Dollenberg from Foster Aero was the pilot in command of the C172 and a final briefing was held with him. Take off was at 06h30 for an initial height of 7 500 feet which gave the jumpers 2 000 feet clearance above the ground. Exit time was just after 07h00. The temperature in the aircraft was around minus one degree Celsius and with the door off, made the wind chill factor high. Carl lined the C172 into wind and slightly upwind. Mike's exit was smooth and he deployed his WesBank ZP-EXE 150 parachute after a four second delay. With the first parachute open the ground crew popped an orange smoke canister, this is vital for the parachutist's assessment of the exact air movement on the landing area. Within seconds of Mike's exit, Graham had the other WesBank parachute open just above the first. Graham, thoroughly enjoying the early morning flight, ate up some altitude whilst picking up some speed for a controlled landing right on target. Mike made a 90 degree turn for that final bit of speed, he dropped below the height of the top of the roof and flared his canopy up the curvature of The Dome roof for a precision tip-toe landing right on the very top of The Dome.

The stunt was all in a days work for the Aerial FX team who specialise in a range of aerial entertainment. Even more so for Mike Rumble, whose offices are based inside The Dome "it is not everyone who can say they have landed a parachute on the roof of their office", he said on arrival at his office door. The landing on the roof of the Coca-Cola Dome was performed as a publicity stunt for the Castrol Xtreme Auto Show in association with WesBank. Each parachute display is individually assessed and the various safety aspects discussed with the Aerial FX ground crew as well as the event organizers. There is a huge amount of organisation required to ensure that the safety of everyone is top of the list. This was finally a dream come true for Graham and Mike and was well worth the five years of preparation and planning. It is with great anticipation that I await my next photographic assignment from Aerial FX as this is only the beginning of some extreme drop zones. 🇿🇦

## CONTACT DETAILS

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