

Pete Dalby Transcript

So I'm Jennifer d'Alton. Today is the first of November 2023. And I am with Peter Dalby at Cameron Balloons, and I need to ask him lots of in-depth questions. not rude ones. So Pete, when did you first see your first balloon? Can you remember?

Wow, yes. I've got to go back to I believe 1984, which, probably from a lot of people involved in ballooning of my age, that's probably not that long ago. But I used to live in a fairly remote part of East Yorkshire. And we didn't see many balloons until one day. I saw some in the distance, I believe they were flying from maybe a European championship event in York, in 1984? And I only saw them in the distance. And thought, Oh, that's interesting, and thought, no more of it.

You were incredibly young then. Were you working?

Was I work was I working I was working. Yeah, I was an engineer for BT, a telephone engineer. So I used to work in Selby telephone exchange in in Yorkshire. And I lived at that time, when I saw those balloons, I was between houses. So we've moved from a tiny little house in Foggerthorpe to a sort of a small holding in Spaldington, two places that most people have never heard of. And in between, we were living in a friend's house. And that's when I saw these, these two or three balloons in the distance.

Just two or three?

Yes, that's right.

Did you chase them? Or did you look them up?

No, no, I. As I said earlier, I thought that well, that's quite interesting. Balloons, never seen one of those before.

And it was not until 1986 that I saw close up my first balloon being inflated or attempted to be inflated and this was the CND balloon.

G-OCND - Golf-Oscar Charlie November Delta. And it was a Peace Festival in Beverly in East Yorkshire. It was a bit of a windy, gusty, hot day, in late June. And they didn't have much joy in getting it stood up.

I knew little, I knew nothing about balloons at that stage. But later that evening, the balloon flew and landed about a quarter of a mile from my house. And the pilot knocked on my door for some assistance. And that is how I got into ballooning.

Who was the pilot? Can you remember?

He was called David Smith. Now there were, I came to understand that there were a number of David Smiths in ballooning at the time. But this particular David Smith was a public school educated, very nicely spoken. hippie.

He dropped out. On that day, he dropped into my life.

And it all changed.

My life changed forever. After that day,

So did you help him? Put it put it back on his trailer or what?

Yes, so the reason it knocked on my door was that we had a CND symbol on our front door. Because we were interested in nuclear disarmament at the time, and we'd been at that festival earlier in the day.

So he knocked on my door to see if I knew the farmer, he has landed a balloon on the road. So I said, well jump in the car, and we'll go and find the farmer. So at the first farm we went to was the owner, and he gave us permission to go and get the balloon.

So I went along with David, and his two passengers that already packed most of the balloon away anyway. And the crew turned up finally, and we put the balloon on the trailer, and then they came back to my house for a couple of beers. And it was in that time we were drinking and talking about flying, because I used to be into hang gliding, that he offered to teach me to fly. Isn't that amazing?

It is incredible. We live in Northumberland and no one's ever seen a balloon. Unless they go slightly South to Yorkshire. You were hand-gliding in Yorkshire?

I was Yes.

And then you were learning how to fly. Where did David live? Did he live near you?

David was based in Nottingham at the time. That's where they operated this CND balloon from and after this, after this first meeting, he gave me their telephone number, his telephone number, and I called - after waking my wife up who was in bed. This is not Julia. This is my first wife, Lorraine. She was in bed, and I woke her up after they'd left. And I said you won't believe what's just happened. And I told her that they'd offered to teach me to fly.

And she said, Yes, go for it. Go for it. So I called them the next day. And I said, Yes, I'd like to take up your offer. And David said to me, OK, be at Roundhay Park

in two weeks' time, we'll be there. Another festival. I went to Roundhay Park, on the allotted date and time. And I had my first ever flight in the balloon.

What did you think,

Within two minutes had been in the air I literally said to myself, I want to do this for the rest of my life. And so far, I have been doing it for the rest of my life.

To jump a bit, you got your licence? Did you get a balloon?

So the other amazing thing about meeting the CND guys, was that later that year, in September 86. David came to visit me with one or two of the other guys from the organisation. And we had a little meeting. And I discovered at that meeting, that they not only wanted to teach me to fly, but they wanted to hand over the operation of the CND balloon to me. Wow. And not only that, but there was £2000 in the bank account that they wanted to give me, and a vehicle!

It is unbelievable.

It it's it was staggering. It staggered me. However, of course, the quid pro quo was that I then had to start organising all the events that the balloon would go to and basically running the operation. So it became a lot of work. But did I enjoy it?

Were you at Greenham Common, when the celebration of the Wall coming down?

Unfortunately, no, I wasn't. But of course yes, Greenham Common was a big thing, that women's peace camp that was happening at that time. And after, after this meeting, where they decided they wanted me to operate the balloon, of course, I carried on learning to fly and we went to a huge number of festivals and events around the country and met a lot of interesting people in the in the Peace organisation, if you like RCND

Incredible. But then CND it didn't fizzle out, but you got more adventurous. I believe.

That's true. Yes. So once I got my licence in eighty-eight, early eighty-eight, I checked out with Kevin Meehan, who was a wonderful examiner still is, actually I believe he may have retired now. But Kevin Meehan checked me out in March of eighty-eight. And then I carried on flying the CND balloon, and it remained active until 1992.,when it failed, its MOT, you know, airworthiness inspection. And during that period, I decided it would be a good idea to obtain my commercial licence.

So I had my private licence in March 88. And at that time, the CAA were just introducing the first commercial licences for ballooning. Up until that period, people had operated commercially under what was called a commercial exemption.

So, I started studying for my commercial exams, and I took them in 1989. And so in July 1989, after another check flight with Mr. Meehan, I became a commercial balloon pilot or professional balloon pilot.

So where did you work from, where we based?

Okay, so I was still based, I was still living in East Yorkshire. Although this stage we decided, my wife and I, we decided that trying to run the smallholding and operate the CND balloon and go ballooning here there and everywhere all over the country wasn't going to work.

So, we decided we would make a huge change our life sell the smallholding and buy a more manageable property. So that we could spend our weekends ballooning and I then started speaking to other pilots, obviously, I got to know a lot of pilots within the sport and industry.

And I started working for a chap in the who was operating the balloon in the Lake District and in the Yorkshire Dales and this was David McCutcheon. So David ran a business of flying balloons in in the Lake District and in in the Yorkshire Dales. So I went to do some flying for David. And I spent quite a number of weekends tethering the Holker Hall balloon. Exactly. Yes. So although the locals would call it hookah, I believe, although it was spelled polka. So I spent some time doing that.

And then. I got to know well-I got to know Phil Dunnington in the late eighties. And we became firm friends almost from the moment we met at a bar in Harrogate at the Brass Monkey balloon meet.

And he decided - he was working for Cameron balloons as the sales director at that time- but he'd decided he wanted to start a balloon rides operation in the Lake District. So he bought Cameron 180. Obviously, he was working for Cameron Balloons, so he bought a Cameron 180. And he asked me to be his first pilot in the Lake District.

What was the name of the company flying the Lake District?

The company was called High Adventure and the balloon was like a forest green colour. But with a rainbow stripe or rainbow stripes around the middle. It was an

extremely attractive balloon. And it was a 180 It was the biggest balloon I'd flown up till that point in time.

And, bizarrely enough on the first flight I had in it was with Phil flying from his field in Churchill in Somerset so that he could check me out as a what we call a group B pilot. And I crashed into a tree with it!

And yet he still checked me out as a Group B pilot because when we took off from his field, it wasn't the conditions weren't the best for flying a big balloon. And as we flew on across Somerset, the wind picked up and I decided on a field that I was going to land in, and I said, Look, Phil, I think I can get in this one. It's the biggest field we've come across. We touched down and we dragged all the way across the field.

In a 120!

In a 180 balloon, the balloon draped itself over a tree at the end of the field. And I thought, oh dear, that's it. I failed. That's my ballooning career. gone up in smoke. Well, not in smoke, but in twigs. We managed to drag the balloon off the tree with no damage whatsoever.

Good heavens!

And Phil said. I think you did a really good job there. I don't think I could have got in that field. So he gave me the job. Brilliant. Brilliant.

He's in Churchill in Somerset. You're living in Spaldington, Spaldington in Yorkshire. So any of East Yorkshire and you're flying for the Lake District?

Exactly.

So this is a lot of miles on your Land Rover?

It certainly is. And at that stage, I was still working for BT. So I started working for Phil in ninety-one. So what I would do during the summer, we only really operated but we flew occasionally in the winter.

But we mostly operated from April through till October. So most weekends, if it was flyable, I would make the journey from East Yorkshire to the Lake District squeezing as many flights as possible. Sometimes I'd go and we just get one flight in. Sometimes I'd go and we'd get four or five flights. And then back home on Sunday, or maybe Monday morning then straight to work for the week. And that's how it was for 1992 1993.

And I finally stopped flying for Phil at the end of 93 to set up my own business in East Yorkshire called 'Heavens Above'.

What balloons did you have for that?

Well, to begin with, we only had a seventy-seven. So we bought a new seventy-seven from Cameron balloons when the CND balloon expired, and it looked remarkably similar to CND. But without the symbols on the side because we liked that design. It was black with rainbow stripes. And so I decided to start in just a small way. And we had a really nice time flying that balloon until we decided we needed a bigger one because I had so many customers to fly.

We weren't getting through them quickly enough. We were flying three at a time in our 77. So after that, we upgraded to 120 which was a nice balloon it was a Cameron demonstrator.

And this is all East Yorkshire at this point.

It is yes, mostly flying from the little town that we lived in at that time, which was called Howden. And we'd occasionally go over to other sites, for instance, Beverly or York, or Doncaster. Depending on where the customers, the passengers were based.

And BT, were they very understanding?

At this stage. I'd finished with BT I stopped working for BT in 1992. They offered me redundancy and gave me some money to go away. So I said thank you very much. And stopped working stopped work as a telephone engineer. And from that day in May 1992 to this day, I've been a professional balloon pilot.

What does your mother think of it?

My mother? She, I guess was probably a little concerned when I said I'm going to give up work and fly balloons for a living.

But my father was very encouraging because he worked, well he worked as a motor engineer before the war, before the Second World War, and he was recruited into the RAF and so he was very, very keen on anything that flew. So, when I became a balloon pilot, one of the trips we took, we made with the CND balloon was to go to Metz in France in 1989, which was early.

Yes, it was one of the first big events in France at well, everyone called it Metz. Now they call it Le Grand Est Mondial Air Ballons. But then everyone knew it Metz

people in the UK still do it rarely. And on that, at that event, I believe there were in excess of 350 balloons. And my father came on that trip with us, and absolutely loved it. So that was a great way to involve him. In ballooning.

Perfect. And do you have siblings? Do you have brothers and sisters who are encouraged by you?

I have two elder brothers, one eldest sister and one younger sister. Let me think 1 – 2 – 3 - 3 of them have flown with me in a balloon. Only my younger sister, Susan hasn't. And I'm not actually sure that she wants to. Although, yes, maybe she will at some stage.

But yes, they were all quite supportive. And so it was. Well, that goes crazy. Pete, you know, I was always probably a little bit of the odd one out in the family, I guess. But yes, it's the sort of thing they expected. I would go off and do so. Yes.

You have you been flying for many years? Were there any flights where you thought? Let's be careful here. Oh, dear, I shouldn't have taken off, or any landings where you were really, really concerned?

Any disasters that you can tell me about?

I can't think of any what you would call disasters. But I do remember a couple of occasions where it might have been more sensible to stay on the ground in the first place shall we say.

One in particular was in let me think timewise in the late nineties. And I at this stage, I've become an instructor. And I was teaching another guy to fly David Farrar, in Yorkshire. He had his own balloon.

And we decided we'd go fly in this particular morning. I turned up at his house, and he had the launch field at the bottom of his garden. And we looked at the weather and thought, yes, it looks okay. It's maybe a little bit faster than we'd want. But yes, let's go for it. There were only the two of us.

We didn't even have a retrieve crew. But we decided look, we'll go fly in anyway. So we inflated the balloon, everything was okay. And we took off. And once we got maybe to five hundred feet, we decided yes, this is quite a quick flight. But obviously, we carried on. And then about half an hour later, I noticed that the wind was picking up even more. And I could see on the surface that it was getting quite windy on the surface. And I said today we didn't do very well at this stage. But I

said to him, 'Look, David, I think I should do the London because it's probably a little bit beyond your experience.'

So I picked a big field, what I thought was a big field. Stubble field thought this is ideal. Let's get in here. Nice low approach. Touchdown at the beginning of the field, the upwind end of the field, started dragging along, thinking okay, we'll come to a halt. Eventually, I'm pulling on the RIP line. And then suddenly, we were airborne again. I thought that's very strange. And then bang, we hit the ground again. And at that stage, I fell out of the basket and the basket ran over me which hurt a lot.

Luckily While I still had the RIP line in my hand, I managed to rollover stand up, follow the balloon on my feet, and within about another 20 or 30 yards, it came to a halt. I looked back and discovered why we became airborne again.

It worked out, it turned out that this field wasn't one field, it was two fields separated by a massive drainage ditch. So we'd come to the end of one field, the basket was in the air again until it hit the start of the other field. And perhaps when I bounced out of the basket, it was a Yeah. Quite a painful thing to happen. Luckily, no broken bones but I was bruised from head to foot.

And David Farrar must have been terrified.

He Well, he was on the bit in the basket on his own. All I could hear him saying was well, not even saying anything. It was just groaning as he was being bounced about. But as I say, luckily, the balloon stopped. We packed it away, left it in the field, walked to the edge of the field, hitched a lift back to where we started from. And then retrieved the balloon, finally, later that morning.

It's a scary landing. It was a very scary landing. And yes, we should have stayed on the ground.

So you finished Yorkshire and the Lake District How come you moved down here?

Okay, so I've got quite heavily involved with in with commercial ballooning. I was flying for Phil in the Lake District. And then I set up my own business. Obviously, I was buying Cameron Balloons. I got to know a lot of people in the factory and that's when I got to know Julia later in the in the 90s 98ish. Sorry, in 90s 96-98. I managed to get the contract to fly a special shape. And this was Bertie Bassett, The Liquorice Allsorts Man. So Bertie Bassett came into my life. And the person I dealt with mostly to finalize all the details about birdie was Julia, Julia Linfield, as

she was at that stage. So Julia was working in the sales department. And we spoke a lot, and I came down to Bristol a lot. We got to know each other better.

And in 1999 in 2001, we were married. And both Hannah and Katie were bridesmaids at the wedding.

Excellent. You've got a family balloon.

We are now this is an interesting question. We had a family balloon. So up until last year, ninety. Sorry. I'm getting all my centuries and decades mixed up into 2022. We sold our family balloon, which was a Concept 60, which we shared with a friend a good friend of mine, Stuart Allen. We sold that and at this very moment in time in 2023. We are having a hopper built at Cameron balloons. That will be our family balloon.

Good heavens. A family balloon. Is it a Double Hopper?

No. Unfortunately, it's only a single hopper. But it's one that I will fly. Stewart will fly. Stewart's son Euan is learning to fly. Hannah can fly, although we also do have another balloon, which I guess you would call a family balloon. But it's in Hannah's name. So Hannah has her own balloon, which is a sports seventy.

So you got your own commercial balloon ballooning company down here?

I do. Yes. So I run a balloon operation now called Phoenix balloons. Which I have run since we got the Bertie Bassett contract. So we used to be Heavens Above, which was just a sole operator, not a limited company. But when I started flying for Trebor Bassett, they insisted that they only dealt with limited companies.

So I formed my own limited company, which was Phoenix balloons limited and that was in 1997. And I've been operating as Phoenix balloons ever since then.

On top of all that, and your children and everything else you also volunteer for the Bristol Fiesta, which is the Bristol Balloon Fiesta, which is one - it's the biggest in the UK. And how did you get into that? Were you sitting on a bus and someone asked you?

So ever since I've been down in Bristol, and ever since the Bertie days of course have attended the Bristol Balloon Fiesta. So I've attended now probably in excess of twenty-five odd fiestas. So, Bertie Bassett was brought to the Fiesta, and then when Bertie finished in 2003, I then got a contract to fly the IKEA balloon.

So we had two IKEA balloons one was a special shape. One was a hopper. And in 2004, IKEA became the title sponsors of the Fiesta. So that meant that my involvement was quite high, although I still wasn't a member of the committee or the board but obviously I had a lot of involvement because I was flying the sponsors the main sponsors balloon.

So we carried on with IKEA for another three or four years although they only sponsored the Fiesta for that first year. And then after that, when IKEA finished In 2006, I got a contract with a company called Hatch Mansfield. Not many people have heard of Hatch Mansfield, but they are wine importers.

And one of the wines they import is Taittinger Champagnes. So in 2007 I started to fly a balloon for which had a logo on it. And it was Taittinger Champagne. I am still flying that balloon in 2023. And they have just agreed to buy a new one. So I still can't retire.

Oh, life's a bitch!

But that brings us back to the Fiesta. And around about 2010 I would say Clive Bailey of Bailey balloons, and also flight director of the Fiesta for many years, decided it was a good time that I should be involved with the Fiesta. So you could say that, yes, volunteered more like.. I was at - what did they call it in the Navy?

Oppressed press ganged.

Press ganged onto the Fiesta flying committee. And I've think probably for the last six years now I have been chairman of the Flying committee. And also for the last five or six years I've been a board member on the on the Fiesta, Bristol International Balloon Fiesta board. And yet they were they it's challenging times. But we're still going.

Yes, it must be challenging because the lockdown knocks a lot of big events on the head. And they couldn't come back up again. And I believe there's quite a lot of ballooning meets around the country, which haven't really taken off again.

Yes, yes. But the COVID lockdown hitter was quite hard as an event.

So we our last full event in was in 2019. And that year, I remember we had awful weather. It was so bad. In fact, the only flight we made during that Fiesta was actually on the Thursday morning when we don't normally free fly.

But we'd seen the forecast for the rest of the weekend, then decided that it was highly unlikely that we would make a free flight. And so we called the flight on and got as many balloons as we could, probably about 40 or 50 Balloons turned up to make a flight on the Thursday morning.

At least to say, look, here we are, we're still here, we're flying. And throughout the weekend, we did tethering, we, I believe we put on a couple of nightglows. One of them was probably the baskets rather than envelopes. And even on the Saturday, the organisation had to make the decision to actually close the site because the weather was so bad. It was so windy and so wet.

And we were fearful that there may have been injuries. Not necessarily involved with ballooning, but the fact that there are a lot of old trees around the perimeter of the launch site. And we thought if you know if a branch breaks off and falls on somebody's head and kills them, you know, we could never sanction anything like that.

You also have the traders, all the food people, they have to be considered to have to work with you. They must realize you can't sell a hot dog in the pouring rain.

Exactly. Yes, if there's nobody turns up well, I mean, the Bristol crowd who come to the Fiesta, they're quite knowledgeable about the weather. And if they see it's blowing a gale and raining, they just don't turn up what's the point? So that was 2019.

And then of course in 2020, we had COVID and we could not run a full Fiesta we couldn't sanction having 1000s of people all squashed together in Ashton Court.

But we decided we would run a sort of a non-public event if you like whereby and we called it, Fiesta flypast. So we made three or four flights from a variety of sites around the city, at least one of them being Ashton Court as well. But we didn't publicize where we were going to fly from. So that was to avoid crowds of people gathering together. And of course, there was still certain restrictions on ballooning at that point in time, you could only carry a certain number of people in the basket, they had to wear masks, etc.

But we at least we made some flights. And we kept the Fiesta banner flying as it were.

And then in 2021, we again, we, we didn't run a full Fiesta, because there was still COVID around, we still had to consider what sort of an event we could put on. So that was another format that we used for them. And then we were back to full operations in 2022.

But again, not with fantastic weather, and likewise, in twenty-three. So it's been a real struggle to keep the Fiesta afloat. And it seems more and more difficult now, to convince people to come up with sponsorship for these large events. And it costs a lot of money to run the Fiesta, people don't realize how much it costs, there's so much infrastructure.

And we don't charge people to come in, okay, if you bring your car, then you've paid car parking. That's one of our revenue streams. But if you walk to the Fiesta site, you walk in for free. And this is something we've always been proud of as an organisation that we offer of Fiesta that is free to the public.

I think it's brilliant. I hope that it goes, it gets better. This year is twenty-four.

Fingers crossed. We're planning ahead.

So have you got anything on the Taittinger side that you coming up that you're going to do?

Are you? Okay, so again, we're planning for 2024.

We, what we tend to do with it nowadays is we take it to events around the country and invite guests of the company to come and fly with us, which is a really nice thing to do, and then serve them some genuinely nice champagne afterwards. And also, when we land on a farmer in a farmer's field, if we offer him a bottle of Taittinger champagne, he is usually quite pleased that we landed on his field, as long as we're careful about where we land obviously, which is always the case when you're when you're ballooning.

So that's something to look forward to, for the next few years. Our new Hopper as well. And yes, things keep popping up surprising things. For instance, last year, and earlier this year, I did two flights with an exceptionally large balloon, a six hundred for Red Bull.

And we flew a balloon with a BMX bowl suspended below it.

I've seen the pictures, is that real?

It is real. We did it.

And who was the nutcase on the BMX going round and round?

He's a guy called Chris Kyle. So he's a Scottish BMX rider. And he is a Red Bull, elite athlete.

So Red Bull, as you know, a big organization. They sell an energy drink, but it appears that one of their main businesses now is supporting athletes and people around the world who extraordinary ordinary things. Formula One obviously been the highest profile, but they sponsor hundreds of other athletes and people who do extraordinary things.

These guys who jump off tall mountains with a wingsuit on and obviously some cyclists, motorcyclists, swimmers, runners, you name it, rally drivers. There are so many different sporting and adventure activities that are they're involved in.

So how did you get involved with Red Bull?

I guess I have Cameron balloons to thank for that. Because they approached Cameron's to ask them to build a balloon, but none of them, the elite athlete, Chris, or his manager, or any of the people who were involved with the with the organization of this stunt had ever flown in a balloon before. So Nick asked me if I would take them flying. And I said, so that they could get an experience of what it was going to be like. And I said, Sure, so I took them for a couple of balloon flights in the Taittinger balloon.

And at that stage, I had not even thought about the fact that I would be the pilot for the stunt balloon. But after the two flights, the two test flights, if you like, orientation flights that we did. The guy I was dealing with mostly Matt Vall, who was the manager of Chris, Chris's manager.

He said, well, so you'll be doing the flights for us Pete. And I went, Well, okay, then. And, yes, it was, I had to jump through a couple of hoops to make sure that I was qualified to do that first. But I did that. And we made as I say, we made two flights with the bowl suspended underneath, and it worked.

As this is going to be an audible, you have an enormous balloon and underneath, can you describe for someone listening, what it was?

Okay, so we'll start with the balloon first, the balloon was a Cameron Z 600, a massive balloon capable of carrying a basket of say thirty people. So instead of that, though, we had a basket underneath this balloon, which would only carry ten people and sent suspended below the basket on wires which were actually

suspended not from the basket but from the mouth of the balloon, which was a reinforced mouth to stop it splitting apart because of the load on it.

So suspended on these wires was a frame, these wires went down to a metal frame, a tubular metal frame. And below the metal frame was a BMX bowl.

Now a BMX bowl is a, you could only describe it as looking like say a swimming pool, a curved swimming pool.

But instead of it being filled with water, it has a rim around it.

And the chap on the bike, or you could use it with a skateboard as well. rolls off the edge into the bowl and does flips and turns and wheelies and all sorts of different tricks.

So this bowl, which was made of carbon fibre, to make it as light as possible, is attached to the upper frame. And around the outside, there's a little security railing as well, so that the cyclist wouldn't fall out. He did also have a parachute just in case he fell out. And that was it, basically.

And this was suspended around about - well from the bottom of the basket to the bottom of the bowl was about five metres.

So when you're actually inflating, inflating a six hundred cubic meter balloon is pretty enormous anyway, but you've then you've got the basket on its side.

Yep.

You've got this BMX bowl, I assume five metres actually quite a long ways. Sort of twenty feet behind. Is it standing up right or?

Yes. So you're right, so the bus, the balloon is laid out with the basket, obviously, attached. Behind the basket, we have the bowl stood back around about ten meters away unattached. So we inflate the balloon. Once it's inflated, and we're tethered to three vehicles at this stage- Of course a six hundred inflated with a 12-man basket underneath it is noticeably light. So it already wants to take off.

So we're tethered, tightly tethered to three vehicles. And then what I have to do is get this off the ground and then manoeuvre it back over the bowl, and then drop it into the bowl. So we nestle the basket into the bowl, and then attach all the suspension wires to the top frame of the bowl. Once everything is attached, then we get rid of the tether lines to the vehicles, put more heat into the balloon and lift up until we take the strain on to the suspension wires. And then we apply more

heat to the balloon obviously because they're at that stage now we've got the weight of the bowl below us, which weighed 2.4 tonnes, 2.4 tonnes! So then, once we were buoyant, with the bowl beneath as we lift off.

Peter is now showing me a photograph and I'm trying not to keep my mouth open in shock. That is incredible.

It's quite a thing, isn't it? Wonderful balloon as well. Genuinely nice balloon. And then there's an image of the frame of the bowl with the basket above it. Two tonnes and that's carbon fibre.

Carbon fibre because it's light, but obviously the metal frame above it weighed probably five hundred kilos. That was a lot of the weight.

Incredible.

So we took off with Chris in the basket with me and his manager and a winch operator because we were going to winch Chris down into the bowl.

His bike was already in the bowl. He had a spare attached to the side of the basket, just in case. We had a film crew on board and we had a drone operator on board.

Goodness!.

So we take off with these guys on board, the bowl suspended underneath and we get to two thousand feet, winch Chris down into the bowl. And that's when he can start doing his stunts.

We needed to be at least two thousand feet up above the ground because if he fell out, he needed that distance for his parachute to operate safely. It was an automatically operating parachute. Luckily, he never needed to use it because he didn't fall out. And we flew across the Wiltshire countryside because we took off from a place called Charlton Park just near Malmsbury. And on the first flight we landed at a place called Colerne which was an old RAF base.

Landing though with two and a half tons of metalwork and stuff underneath the basket must have been horrendously difficult.

Landing was always going to be a challenge. And in the beginning of this project, I was discussing with some of the design engineers here at Cameron's about how it was going to be best to land this.

We initially thought well maybe when the bowl touches the ground If we could possibly release the balloon from the bowl and land the bowl in then land the bowl in front.

But we quickly realized that that was never going to be a good idea. Because suddenly losing 2.4 tonnes would mean even with the top of the balloon pulled out to, to start to deflate, we would probably shoot up into the sky quite some distance. So we decided that was definitely not a safe option. So the decision came down to the fact that we must keep the balloon attached to the bowl. And when we landed, the basket would after the bowl stopped going forward across the ground, which we assumed it would do,

we would have to let the basket drop into the bowl. Obviously at this stage, we'd winched Chris back into the basket, so he was safe. And it turns out, this was by far the best option.

We had some restraining wires from the from the top frame of the bowl to the basket to prevent it from going too far forward. So the basket would always stay within the confines of the top frame of the bowl.

So on the first landing, we landed probably about six and a half knots. So we touched down. I couldn't see the ground beneath the bowl. And I thought that could be an issue. And I decided before we made the first flight, the best way to deal with that was to leave one of the crown lines dangling with an extra bit of rope attached to it. A colourful, in fact, actually a bright white piece of rope attached to it, which suspended below the bottom of the bowl by about two meters.

So I knew that as soon as I saw I could see the crown lined ahead of the bowl. As soon as I saw the crown line touch the ground. I knew that it was safe to rip out and the bowl would touch very soon. And then we would move along in a series of hops, which we did eventually stop because when you've got 2.4 tonnes on the ground. It soon stops the balloon. And then the basket descended into the bowl. And it worked. And that was the first time I'd ever flown that balloon.

Good heavens. That's a real adventure real Boy's Own isn't it?

It certainly was. Well, I still pinch myself sometimes.

What are they going to come up with next?

Who knows?

Anyway, I have I thought I'd listen to you for half an hour but what have we done over an hour ago? Pete Dalby Thank you very much indeed. Absolutely wonderful. And if we possibly have a photograph of your balloons, which I could put onto the website?

Yes, it went with it. Yes.

And obviously a bottle of Taittinger?

I'll see what I can do.

Thank you, Pete Dalby. Thank you.

58.56