

# Skydivers tumble and fall, but are addicted nevertheless

By Bill Graf

There are drug addicts, there are running addicts, now, there are skydiving addicts.

Claude Wilson, a jumpmaster and instructor with the Lincoln-based Expert School of Parachute Jumping, said, "When I started jumping I was in school, and like everyone else in school I was always broke. But I never had any trouble finding the money to go skydiving. It was like a drug addiction, only worse."

Wilson explained that for him, skydiving allows a freedom that is difficult to find in modern society.

"While diving, you must concentrate totally on what you're doing. It's like a most jealous mistress, it bleeds all other problems or thoughts from your mind."

Max Nelson, who is working towards his parachute rigger rating, said he skydives for the excitement.

"I like the speed of mobility a skydiver has. Just the slightest movement of your hands will cause you to go off in a different direction."

Maggie Bacon, a UNL student said she had always wanted to skydive or hand glide.

After her roommate made her first jump, Bacon decided to give skydiving a try.

"I took my first jump, on the way down I decided that it was the sport for me."

Twenty jumps later, Bacon said that like an addiction, she is "caught up" in skydiving.

However, once she became more caught up than she cared to be.

"I was tumbling during my free fall," Bacon said. When I release the chute, the risers wrapped around my legs." Risers are lines that connect the jumper to the canopy of the parachute.

She added that she had been trained to handle the situation, and because of that training a tragic incident was avoided.

MARY WARING, a junior at UNL, said she started to skydive "because it was a sport that I hadn't tried yet, so I decided what the heck."

Waring has only made one jump but she said she hopes to jump again as soon as she finds the time.

"The scariest part is standing out on the strut waiting to jump." But once you make the jump, she said, "It's great."

"It's really quite safe," Waring said. "If something goes wrong with your main chute, you pull this tab which releases the chute and at the same time opens the reserve chute."

Waring took advantage of the school's one jump course.

Wilson said that this six-hour beginner course covers how to land, how to exit the plane, body positions, canopy control and emergency procedures.

"About half of the class deals with what to do in case of an emergency. If you don't have it when you need it, you'll never have a chance to try it again," Wilson said.

Wilson also said skydiving is the fastest non-mechanical sport.

"ONCE A DIVER reaches his terminal speed, he will be falling between 100 and 200 mph."

By applying the right moves, horizontal speeds of 60 mph can be reached, he added.

According to Wilson, one skydiver who jumped out of a balloon at 102,800 feet was able to break the speed of sound during his free fall.

Although no one in the Lincoln-based Sport Parachute Club has reached the speed of sound, they still do more than just jump out of airplanes.

"The most complex formation I've been in involved 31 jumpers," Wilson said. He added they are trying to get away from the basic circle formations where all the divers join hands.

"One formation which includes 16 members is called a quadradiamond. Four divers form a diamond and the four diamonds are joined at their points."

He explained that the divers have between 45 and 70 seconds to make the formation and break and open their chutes to allow enough time to land safely.

Collectively, the members of the Lincoln jump club make about 5,000 jumps a year.

In their 22 year history, Wilson figures the club has made about 110,000 jumps with only one death.

"Statistically it doesn't sound bad," Wilson said.

"But it is bad. Nearly all skydiving accidents can be traced to a human failure. In the case of the one death, we asked him to wear a certain piece of safety equipment, and he refused."

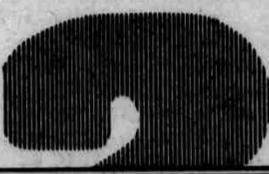
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