



Mr Blue Skies

You are sitting in a tiny aircraft. You're crammed in with 13 friends and no one feels like talking. For 20 long minutes your plane climbs up into the sky, above the clouds and into the atmosphere. When your aircraft reaches three miles above the earth a signal is given, a door opens and you step out... into very thin air.

Not something that most of us will ever experience but almost a matter of routine for Brian Cumming and his fellow skydivers, who have just broken the British record for flying in formation.

Looking like flying squirrels in their wingsuits, which give them amazing control over their speed and direction as they plummet towards the ground, the 14 friends manoeuvred themselves into a precise shape and held it long enough for

well, it feels 'still'. There's a quietness about the formation that is hugely empowering.

"The most dangerous part of the skydive is the end. We can't all open our parachutes in the same place as they would get tangled so we need horizontal separation from each other. Getting enough space can be tricky.

"Back on the ground, firstly there's relief that we're down without incident and then there's a long pregnant pause while we wait for the judges to



Wing man: Brian Cumming.

adjudicators watching below to judge the formation.

Thought control

So what does a jump really feel like? Over to Brian: "When we're preparing, on the ground and before the jump there's an air of nervous excitement. Some people need to psych themselves up, some have to calm themselves down.

"The climb to altitude is 20 minutes of cramped concentration with only your thoughts for company. If you don't have confidence in your skill and the skill of those around you then your thoughts can be sabotaging.

Judging distance

"When we jump the hardest thing is the spacing between each other. It's easy in everyday life to judge distances between people as the ground is there for reference. In the air, there's nothing to help.

"If a formation attempt is going badly there are people everywhere and the sightlines are skew-whiff. When it's going



Blue skies: A diver's eye view of the jump. Photo by Mark Harris.

pore over the video evidence."

Major surgery

Brian, 38, is a former resident of Deanery Close, N2, now living in Regents Park Road. He took an AFF (Accelerated Free Fall) course in 2003 which began his passion for the sport and he is now a full-time skydiver. However, he underwent major organ surgery in late 2013. Multiple complications led to him losing three stone in weight and having to take six months off work.

As Brian's strength returned he began training and, in April this year, he ran the London Marathon, raising money for St Mark's Hospital Foundation. In August he rode his bike 100 miles during RideLondon, again raising funds for St Marks.

As we go to press, the skydiving team is travelling to

California to have a crack at the world record.

If you want to know more about skydiving, Brian is a qualified instructor and can be contacted at www.askmeaboutskydiving.com



Sky high: Brian, bottom left, with his fellow skydivers during their record-breaking jump. Photo by Mark Harris.

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