

Austrian freefaller inspires awe in watching millions

October 15 2012, by Naomi Seck

The world looked on in fear and awe as Austrian daredevil Felix Baumgartner [jumped from the edge of outer space on Sunday](#), breaking a slew of records and winning millions of instant fans.

The [video feed](#)—broadcast on a 20-second delay intended to give news stations time to cut away in case tragedy struck—was viewed by more than seven million people on [YouTube](#) alone.

The death-defying jump riveted audiences hungry for a genuinely extraordinary feat in an age when NASA is mothballing [human spaceflight](#) and many other supposed thrill-seekers simply perform elaborate stunts.

Reactions poured in on Facebook and [Twitter](#) from people around the globe who had followed every step of the drama-packed mission, their lingering cynicism quickly turning to disbelief bordering on reverence.

First Baumgartner ascended in a small capsule attached to a massive helium-filled balloon, rising for more than two hours to reach a dizzying altitude more than 24 miles (39 kilometers) above the Earth.

There was unexpected drama and minutes of uncertainty after it emerged that the heating mechanism on his visor wasn't working.

Maybe this would be just like all the other PR exercises, but No! he shifted forward to the edge of the capsule, the Earth but a distant [blue](#)

[haze](#) below, and launched himself into freefall.

The biggest risk Baumgartner faced was spinning out of control, which could have exerted excessive G-force and made him lose consciousness. A controlled dive from the capsule was essential, putting him in a head-down position to increase speed.

Transfixed viewers around the world looked on in agony as the Austrian started tumbling chaotically for what seemed like an eternity before finally achieving the correct position.

"Who else saw Felix Baumgartner jump?? Damn what a legend!" Gregor Bates, watching in the British city of Bristol, wrote on Twitter.

Adam Polselli, in US city of San Francisco, tweeted "More than anything, I'm impressed by Felix Baumgartner's courage. May we all be that brave when we step into the unknown."

Austrians were particularly proud.

President Heinz Fischer posted on his [Facebook](#) page: "I warmly congratulate Felix Baumgartner on this great success, which was achieved with courage and perseverance and is finding worldwide attention."

Jesus Diaz, who covered the event live for technology website Gizmodo, wrote that he "teared up" watching the successful conclusion of the jump.

"He did it, people. He jumped from the edge of space, broke some records, and survived," Diaz wrote.

"Kudos to you, Felix. As you were falling faster than any man in history,

you made our collective hearts stop, then swell."

Some drew parallels to Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, saying Baumgartner would inspire the next generation of space pioneers.

Andrew Kavanagh of Ireland suggested that future adventurers may have been paying attention: "My son has spent the past half hour doing Felix Baumgartner impersonations..."

Some had a less reverent take on the daredevil feat.

"Just watched a dude jump from near space. Humans are really dumb and really awesome," wrote Geoff G, in the southeastern US state of Louisiana, on Twitter.

All for a feat whose scientific significance was not clear, some argued.

"Felix Baumgartner has made a giant leap for a man but an infinitesimally small step for mankind," tweeted Peter Bradshaw, whose location was not specified.

Baumgartner broke at least three records: the highest freefall leap, the fastest speed ever achieved by a human and the first person to break the sound barrier of around 690 miles (1,110 kilometers) per hour in [freefall](#).

He said before the attempt that "part of this entire experience will help make the next pressure suit safer for space tourists and aviators."

Former [NASA](#) Astronaut Leroy Chiao, speaking on the US news channel CNN after the dive, concurred, saying "the technologies that they have developed, pressure suit technologies, I think you are going to see these things incorporated into future pressure suits that are used in

spacecraft."

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