

Austrian space diver no stranger to danger

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Felix Baumgartner, the Austrian daredevil who had hoped to make history Tuesday with a jump from the edge of space, is no stranger to death-defying danger.

The 43-year-old, who said he may now try his aborted jump on Thursday, is hoping to break at least three records by conducting the highest and the fastest [freefall jump](#) and by becoming the first human to break the speed barrier without an aircraft.

"I love a challenge, and trying to become the first person to break the speed of sound in freefall is a challenge like no other," he said ahead of the canceled stunt in the skies over New Mexico.

Tuesday's attempt was scuttled at the last minute due to gusting winds which buffeted the huge, gossamer-thin balloon used to lift the [skydiver](#) to an altitude of 23 miles (36 km). Another bid may be made Thursday.

Baumgartner, born on April 20, 1969, grew up in the shadow of the Alps in Salzburg, Austria. He dreamed of skydiving and flying helicopters from an early age.

He made his first skydive at the age of 16, and improved his skills after joining the Austrian military, becoming a member of its Special Forces demonstration team.

One of Baumgartner's first records was in 1999 for the lowest BASE jump ever from the hand of Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer statue

in Brazil, which is only 95 feet above the ground.

Baumgartner has "Born to Fly" tattooed in large letters on his forearm. BASE is an acronym for the four things which are jumped from: buildings, antennas, spans and earth.

The Austrian, a licensed gas balloon and helicopter pilot, twice set world records for the highest BASE jump from a building.

The first was from the 1,479-foot (450.8-meter) Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1999, and five years later from the even taller Taipei 101 tower in Taiwan.

In 2003, he completed the first winged "freefall crossing" of the English Channel, jumping out of an aircraft and flying the rest of the way to Calais in northern France with a pair of carbon wings.

Other feats include parachuting into a 623-foot (190-meter) deep cave in Croatia, leaping off the highest bridge in the world, the 1,125-foot (343-meter) high Viaduc de Millau in France.

Baumgartner has also imprinted his hands and feet in concrete in Vienna's "Street of Champions" and was nominated for a World Sports Award and two categories in the NEA Extreme Sports Awards.

He has been training for Tuesday's Red Bull Stratos jump—from 120,000 feet (23 miles, 36 kilometers)—for five years, and has successfully jumped from 71,600 feet (21.8 kilometers) and 97,100 feet (29.6 kilometers).

A major danger, he said, is losing consciousness.

"That could happen if I get into a flat spin... like a CD on a CD player.

Then the blood goes to the head and leads to red-out. Black-out is the opposite, when the blood goes to the feet."

But he said it is unlikely that he will pay the ultimate price for his love of skydiving.

"In order for me to die, lots of things have to happen at the same time," Baumgartner said.

Meticulous planning makes that outcome unlikely, he said.

"I think it is all about preparation. Do your homework, you know. I hate it if someone calls me a thrill-seeker or an adrenaline junkie because I am not. I like the whole planning," Baumgartner said.

He divides his time between Switzerland and the United States but says: "The air is where I am at home."

"I believe in God and I truly believe that there is a plan that he has for everybody. And I also believe that he has a plan for me. It looks like I am becoming an astronaut," he has said.

"I'm going to slide the door open, bail out and become the first human person in freefall to break the speed of sound," he said.

"That is His plan and that is probably my last goal that I have to accomplish."

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