

# Daredevil's sky jump provides global moment of awe

October 15 2012, by Juan Carlos Llorca

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This image made from video, provided by Red Bull Stratos shows pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria as he jumps out of the capsule during the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos on Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012. In a giant leap from more than 24 miles up, Baumgartner shattered the sound barrier Sunday while making the highest jump ever—a tumbling, death-defying plunge from a balloon to a safe landing in the New Mexico desert. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos)

(AP)—Felix Baumgartner stood poised in the open hatch of a capsule suspended above Earth, wondering if he would make it back alive. Twenty four miles (38 kilometers) below him, millions of people were watching on the Internet and marveling at the moment.

A second later, he stepped off and barreled toward a U.S. desert as a white speck against a dark sky. The Austrian-born Baumgartner shattered the [sound barrier](#) and landed safely about nine minutes later, becoming the world's first supersonic [skydiver](#).

"When I was standing there on top of the world, you become so humble, you do not think about breaking records anymore, you do not think about gaining scientific data," Baumgartner said after Sunday's jump. "The only thing you want is to come back alive."

The jump was part scientific wonder, part reality show, with the live-streamed event capturing the world's attention on a sleepy Sunday. It proved, once again, the power of the Internet in a world where news travels as fast as Twitter.

The event happened without a network broadcast in the United States, though organizers said more than 40 [television stations](#) in 50 countries—including cable's Discovery Channel in the U.S.—carried the [live feed](#). Instead, people flocked online, with more than 8 million simultaneous views of a YouTube [live stream](#) at its peak, [YouTube](#) officials said.

More than 130 digital outlets carried the feed, organizers said.

The privately funded feat came during a lull in [human space exploration](#). As the jump unfolded, the U.S. [space shuttle Endeavour](#) crept toward a Los Angeles museum, where it will spend its retirement on display.

The 43-year-old Baumgartner hit Mach 1.24, or 833.9 mph (1,341.97 kph), according to preliminary data, and became the first person to go faster than the speed of sound without traveling in a jet or a spacecraft. The capsule he jumped from reached an altitude of 128,100 feet (39,044 meters), carried by a 55-story, ultra-thin [helium balloon](#).



Felix Baumgartner, of Austria, gestures prior to speaking with the media after successfully jumping from a space capsule lifted by a helium balloon at a height of just over 128,000 feet above the Earth's surface, Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012, in Roswell, N.M. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Landing on his feet in the desert, the man known as "Fearless Felix" lifted his arms in victory to the cheers of friends and spectators. His mother, Eva Baumgartner, cried.

"Sometimes we have to get really high to see how small we are," an exuberant Baumgartner told reporters.

About half of Baumgartner's descent was a [free fall](#) of 119,846 feet (36,529 meters), according to Brian Utley, a jump observer from the FAI, an international group that works to determine and maintain the integrity of aviation records.



In this photo provided by Red Bull, pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria lands in the desert after his successful jump on Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012 in Roswell, N.M. Baumgartner came down safely in the eastern New Mexico desert minutes about nine minutes after jumping from his capsule 128,097 feet, or roughly 24 miles, above Earth (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Predrag Vuckovic) MANDATORY CREDIT

During the first part of Baumgartner's free fall, he spun uncontrollably. He said he felt pressure building in his head but did not feel as though he was close to passing out.

"When I was spinning first 10, 20 seconds, I never thought I was going to lose my life, but I was disappointed because I'm going to lose my record. I put seven years of my life into this," he said.

He added: "In that situation, when you spin around, it's like hell and you don't know if you can get out of that spin or not. Of course it was terrifying. I was fighting all the way down because I knew that there must be a moment where I can handle it."



This image provided by Red Bull Stratos shows pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria as he jumps out of the capsule during the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos on Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012. In a giant leap from more than 24 miles up, Baumgartner shattered the sound barrier Sunday while making the highest jump ever—a tumbling, death-defying plunge from a balloon to a safe landing in the New Mexico desert. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos)

Baumgartner said traveling faster than sound is "hard to describe because you don't feel it." The pressurized suit prevented him from feeling the rushing air or even the loud noise he made when breaking the sound barrier.

With no reference points, "you don't know how fast you travel," he said.

Baumgartner's accomplishment came on the 65th anniversary of the day that U.S. test pilot Chuck Yeager became the first man to officially break the sound barrier in a jet. Yeager commemorated that feat on Sunday, flying in the back seat of an F-15 Eagle as it broke the sound barrier at more than 30,000 feet (9,144 meters) above California's Mojave Desert.



In this photo provided by Red Bull Stratos, Pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria celebrates after successfully completing the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos in Roswell, N.M., Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012. Baumgartner came down safely in the eastern New Mexico desert minutes about nine minutes after jumping from his capsule 128,097 feet, or roughly 24 miles, above Earth. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Balazs Gardi)

At Baumgartner's insistence, some 30 cameras recorded his stunt. Shortly after the launch early Sunday, screens at mission control showed the capsule, dangling from the massive balloon, as it rose gracefully above the New Mexico desert. Baumgartner could be seen on video, calmly checking instruments inside.

The dive was more than just a stunt. The U.S. space agency NASA, which was not involved in the jump, is eager to improve its spacecraft and spacesuits for emergency escape.



In this photo provided by Red Bull, pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria is seen in a screen at mission control center in the capsule during the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos in Roswell, N.M. on Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012. Baumgartner plans to jump from an altitude of 120,000 feet, an altitude chosen to enable him to achieve Mach 1 in free fall, which would deliver scientific data to the aerospace community about human survival from high altitudes.(AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Stefan Aufschnaiter)

Baumgartner's team included Joe Kittinger, who first tried to break the sound barrier from 19.5 miles (31 kilometers) up in 1960, reaching speeds of 614 mph (988 kph). With Kittinger inside mission control, the two men could be heard going over technical details during the ascension.

"Our guardian angel will take care of you," Kittinger radioed to Baumgartner.

On Twitter, half the worldwide trending topics had something to do with the jump.



This photo provided by Red Bull Stratos shows pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria as he jumps out of the capsule during the final manned flight for Red Bull Stratos on Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012. In a giant leap from more than 24 miles up, Baumgartner shattered the sound barrier Sunday while making the highest jump ever—a tumbling, death-defying plunge from a balloon to a safe landing in the New Mexico desert. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Jay Nemeth)



This attempt marked the end of a long road for Baumgartner, a record-setting high-altitude jumper. He has said this was his final jump.

The sponsor, beverage maker Red Bull, has never said how much the complex project cost.



The capsule and attached helium balloon carrying Felix Baumgartner lifts off as he attempts to break the speed of sound with his own body by jumping from a space capsule lifted by a helium balloon, Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012, in Roswell, N.M. Baumgartner plans to jump from an altitude of 120,000 feet, an altitude chosen to enable him to achieve Mach 1 in free fall, which would deliver scientific data to the aerospace community about human survival from high

altitudes.(AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Baumgartner failed to break Kittinger's record for the longest free fall, at 4 minutes and 36 seconds. Baumgartner's free fall was timed at 4 minutes and 20 seconds.

"I was putting everything out there and hope for the best, and if we left one record for Joe—hey it's fine," Baumgartner said when asked if he intentionally left the record for Kittinger to hold. "We needed Joe Kittinger to help us break his own record, and that tells the story of how difficult it was and how smart they were in the '60s. He is 84 years old, and he is still so bright and intelligent and enthusiastic".



In this photo provided by Red Bull, Eva Baumgartner of Austria watches her son, Felix Baumgartner, as he attempts to break the speed of sound with his own body by jumping from a space capsule lifted by a helium balloon, Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012, in Roswell, N.M. Baumgartner landed safely on Earth after a 24-mile (38.6-kilometer) jump from high the stratosphere in a dramatic, daring feat that may also have marked the world's first supersonic skydive. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Stefan Aufschnaiter, HO)

Baumgartner has said he plans to settle down with his girlfriend and fly helicopters on mountain rescue and firefighting missions in the U.S. and Austria.

Before that, though, he said, "I'll go back to LA to chill out for a few days."



This photo provided by Red Bull shows the balloon lifts up during the helium balloon carrying Felix Baumgartner, Sunday, Oct. 14, 2012, in Roswell, N.M. Baumgartner plans to jump from an altitude of 120,000 feet, an altitude chosen to enable him to achieve Mach 1 in free fall, which would deliver scientific data to the aerospace community about human survival from high altitudes.(AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Predrag Vuckovic, HO)

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