



## SECOND GENERATION SKYDIVER

# BRETT LONNON

By Kelly Brennan

Introducing **Brett Lonnon**, the latest of the DZ kids to emerge as a fully fledged jump pig. Not only that, but he's currently **Australia's youngest certified skydiver!**



Brett is the 15-year-old year old son of Pete Lonnon and Chrissy Sparrow, owners of Skydive Jurien Bay, in Western Australia. Fifteen years and 8 months, to be precise, when his shiny new Certificate A was issued. (The youngest ever goes to Shane Onis who was 15 years and 18 days old. And didn't that escalate quickly?!)

*"I am so proud of how he's going and his attitude to the sport!",* said Chrissy.

Brett did his first of many tandems when he was 9 years old at a Boogie in Jurien. *"And I for sure knew after that I was going to do it solo,"* he said. Yes, jumpers did apply some gentle pressure along the way. *"But that didn't matter because I was sure keen to do it anyways!"*

### Wait or waiver?

*"Initially I was counting down the days until my 16th birthday because that was when I could legally start my AFF course,"* he explained. But then he decided to try to

persuade the APF to let him do it early.

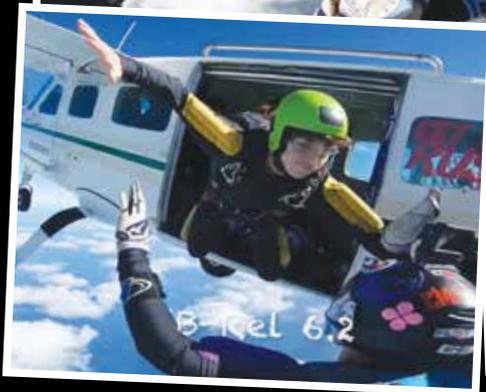
*"His birthday is in early November, just days after we cease AFF every year due to the strong Summer sea gales,"* said Chrissy. *"Not sea breezes!"*

Brett also pointed out that he has done 15 tandems over the years, has spent a couple of hours in the tunnel (about three years ago), and has grown up around the drop zone.

APF Safety and Training Manager, Charl Rootman, issued the rare age waiver after discussion with the Safety and Training Committee. Like Shane, Brett's time on the DZ and his many tandems were factors that helped with the decision. Plus it was only a few months early.

*"It is always satisfying seeing the next generation of skydivers emerging, following in the footsteps of their parents,"* said Charl. *"It strengthens our belief that there is a strong future for our sport and industry."*





### Parental supervision...

"Pete and I are separated, but when we discussed it, we agreed that it would be better for the other instructors to do his course," said Chrissy. "Because kids never listen to their parents!"

So, the J-Bay DZSO, Heath Baird, did his ground school and handed him to AFF instructors Lindsey and Dan to look after the bosses' kid. Pressure much? "No pressure," insisted Heath. "Just trying to relieve theirs!"

"I would be lying if I said I wasn't scared on the way up," said Brett. "But once I got under canopy after the freefall, I was having so much fun."

While his parents weren't Brett's jumpmasters for that first AFF, they were both keeping a very close eye on it. "Being outside camera for Brett's first jump in less than ideal conditions at last light was definitely a sobering moment," confessed Pete, a man of few words for this article.

Chrissy was more than a thousand kilometres away, on an island near Karratha, but she was online watching the manifest and Flight Radar, so she knew exactly when Brett exited. Then she received a message about his success, and also Pete's footage of the jump.

### Through the Stages...

Stage 2 was another one with J-Bay staff, then Pete did Stages 3 to 6 with him.

"That moment when I released Bretto on Stage 3 for 15 seconds, I held my breath," said Pete, who started jumping

when he was 19. "Stage 4 was a hoot. It seemed as if I was skydiving with myself."

Chrissy picked up with Stage 7, as she and Pete did their tag team swap at the DZ. "I only had time to look at his Stage 4, which was awesome, so I knew he would be a good student," she said. "I was less nervous than I have been for other students with not quite the same skill set anyway!"

So, just how good was he? "I can't really think of another student I've seen or trained who has been better than him, so I'm super-proud, especially of his general awareness in freefall and his canopy control," said his proud Mum.

Chrissy also did Stages 8 and 9 with her son, and then his B-Rel's the next week, in between Brett working every day at the local Caltex. (During this time he also managed to sucker her in to packing for him if he had to race off.)

Brett really wanted it all done before the end of school holidays because he's away at boarding school through the term.

Chrissy decided to have some fun on his first 4-Way B-Rel, turning blocks with a Zigzag Marquis. "It was a little messy, but we got it, and he was totally stoked afterwards," she said.

He nailed the second one as well, so the third was a chance to fly a few points, with a horny gorilla at the end. In a hectic couple of weeks, Brett went all the way through from AFF to completing his B-Rel table, logging 25 jumps.

"Right now I'm just trying to jump as much as possible so I can get my 'B' Licence and hopefully start doing some Freeflying when I am more experienced," he said.



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## Mum knows best...

As well as Brett's flying skills and height awareness, Chrissy was certainly pleased with his mindset. He was neither cocky nor freaking out.

She'd always encouraged his sporting pursuits, like snow skiing since age four, as well as water skiing and skateboarding. "After so many years doing first jump courses and AFF, I know how much easier it is to train students who have done speed and balance sports before," said Chrissy.

Brett also did some tunnel in Dubai when he was 11, and he was learning to sit fly in the Perth tunnel when he was about 12.

"I'm also stoked by his canopy control and landings," she said. "So far (touch wood) he's never even looked like doing anything stupid, and isn't just aiming for the general clear area, but is not happy if he doesn't get right next to the cones."

"I guess years of helping me catch tandems on the beach has done him some good there too."

## Future plans...

Could Brett have his sights set on the family business? "I told him an aircraft engineer would be the best thing because all his father does is fix stuff," said Chrissy.

The year 10 student is also keen to fly and he'd love to go travelling overseas. But he also has a good grasp on the challenges ahead.

"I haven't officially started flying but I've been doing practice flying with my Dad in the Cessna 172 around Jurien," he said.



"I think I might have to wait a while to fully get started on my licence as I would be juggling school and ATAR exams around with learning to fly, but we'll see how it goes."

Any advice from Dad? "Learn to pack," said Pete. "And don't get your probabilities confused with your capabilities!"

Mum isn't too worried about his jump bill. "I've told him he can do a year's worth of free AFF jumps for me when he's got that rating," said Chrissy.

Jump bills could get very expensive. Brett's younger sister, Bronte, has just turned 13. She did her first tandem at seven years old, and there have been two more since then. She doesn't have the excuse of a birthday at the start of summer, so she might have to wait until she turns 16. But, she's competitive too, and sibling rivalry could kick in. So, watch this space!

For now, Brett is keen to do the horny gorilla again and is asking about all the other fun stuff he can do. "We have the State Meet at J Bay in September," said Chrissy. "With boarding school he won't be able to train, but he'll definitely be competing somehow!"

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BRETT LONNON



