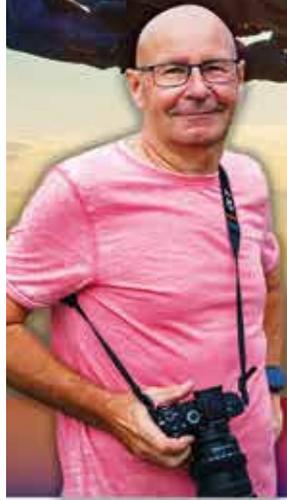


By Kelly Brennan



STEVE FITCHETT

chasing rainbows

IF **STEVE FITCHETT** EVER GETS AROUND TO RELEASING A BOOK, HE'LL CALL IT **'CHASING RAINBOWS'**. IT'S A PICTURE-PERFECT TITLE. PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE RAINBOWS THAT HAVE HELPED BRIGHTEN STEVE'S LIFE. BUT ALSO BECAUSE HE TOO USES REFRACTION AND REFLECTION OF LIGHT FOR STUNNING AERIAL ARTWORKS THAT STOP US IN OUR TRACKS!

Sometimes Fitch even surprises himself when he looks through his shots. *"I feel a bit of a sham as I think I'm just just incredibly lucky with most of the images I capture,"* he says. *"My best work seems to be after I land and I'm not quite sure what just occurred, I always think that's when magic happened."*

Like most 'magic' in this sport, it doesn't happen by accident. Steve Fitchett's back story includes close to seven thousand jumps; three thousand of them flying camera. He has decades of experience in both skydiving and photography. And he's kept up with incredible changes in both.

PROUD AUSSIE ...

"Well I'm a Pom originally and started jumping in the UK in the early 80s," Fitch begins telling his story. Then he casually leaps ahead to representing his country on the British CRW team at three world meets. *"I always hit it off well with the Aussies (who wouldn't?!), so, when the chance came, I moved out here to South East Queensland 20 years ago and have enjoyed the Aussie lifestyle ever since!"*

Let's backtrack a moment to fill some essential gaps for a skydiving profile. Steve Fitchett's first jump was in

1983 at Dunkeswell, Devon. It was a Static Line on a C9 round canopy with a front mounted reserve. A couple of years later he became a Static Line Instructor and he despatched students for three years before falling into CRW by accident. Somehow he'd bought a canopy which was intended for a CRW team. When he stood his ground on keeping the canopy, the team said he'd just have to join them. That's how he got into CRW and competition.

After he finished competition jumping and wondered what he was going to do next, Steve was asked to help out by jumping camera at the British Military Nationals. He did a camera flying course for a week and was soon the Sergeant Major's main man for military camera work. From there, things quickly went from strength to strength.

Then, the rainbow chasing began. Steve was driving with his wife Lesley one damp day when rainbows appeared in the spray from the car in front. They talked about chasing rainbows together. The phrase summed up their excitement as they prepared to move to Australia in 1997. Sadly, Lesley died from breast cancer soon after they arrived. Steve kept chasing rainbows alone, and he became an Australian citizen as soon as he could.



PHOTOGRAPHY FIRST...

There's a reason why Steve's photos make so many ASM cover shots and also international publications. "I get excited by great imagery and, whilst I do shoot video, I always consider myself a stills photographer," says Fitch, who has won awards for his work.

It's an interest that started in school. He didn't have a camera but he poured over articles and photographs by mountaineer, Chris Bonnington, in the photographic magazines. "One of the important things I realised from his work was 'You have to be there if you want to get the shot,'" says Fitch.

And getting the shot is what it's all about for those who hire him. "It just blows you away, the shots that he gets," says high profile display jumper, Rodney Benson. Regardless of the weather, the logistics or the type of jump, Rod says Steve seems to capture something sensational. "He might even be just climbing out the door and he looks back at the right moment and takes a brilliant shot."

There was another rainbow moment over Surfers Paradise recently, when Steve captured a magnificent shot of the RAAF loadmasters on the open ramp of the C17. It was one of many terrific images for the World Parachute Championships.

Fitch has another opportunity to perform on the international stage this year. He'll be one of two Aussie Steves in the camera team for the Bigway record attempt in Perris Valley, California, in May. Fitch and 'Spot' (AKA Steve Tonson) will join some of the world's best in a team led by Craig O'Brien, whose work includes several Hollywood blockbusters.

VISUALS AND VERSATILITY...

Beyond his experience and his top notch equipment, Fitch is a master of versatility. His website (www.fitchimages.com) features favourites from every discipline. (But Fitch concedes his wingsuit shots were distant and tightly cropped!) He also has a special knack with outdoor portraits. Many skydivers have felt comfortable enough with him to venture out at dawn for stunning nude shots in waterfalls or surf, or even just around the drop zone where he transforms normal items into striking backdrops.

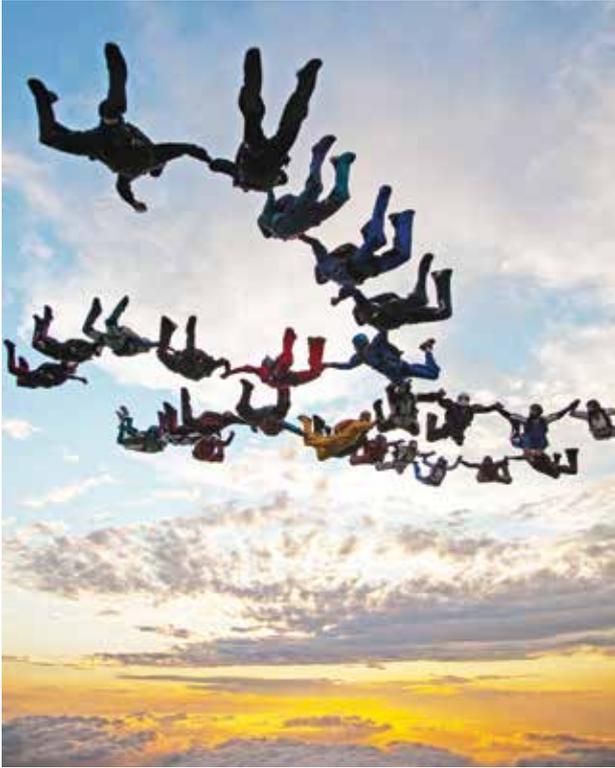
Long term skydiver, Archie Jamieson, first met Fitch back at the CRW meet at Kooralbyn before he came to Australia. They've worked together for decades on TV shoots, boogies, displays and major events. "While a lot of Skydivers just take pictures, Steve is a genuine world class, skydiving photographer," says Archie. "Whether it be a bigway, a flag, an angle, a demo, taking nude photos of your wife or chasing a couple of freestylers zooming around the skies, Steve is the man to capture the moment."

Fitch likes it even more when there is a challenge involved: "The best fun for me is when I have to fly the hardest, like the Parabatics. I'd chase really aggressively and then they'd suddenly turn 180 degrees and come straight back at me!"

Rod Benson says you couldn't meet a more obliging person, and Archie agrees: "A true professional to work with, who always gets the results, and a bloody nice bloke as well!"

Fitch is always keen to share his knowledge and he's passionate about camera flying safety. He was midway through a camera safety seminar at a Nagambie bigway event when somebody realised there was a double rainbow outside and his class deserted him to gaze at the sky. He couldn't really argue, because he too was reaching for his camera, always charged up and ready to shoot.





RING A BELL...

Not only has Fitch been around for many 'Ring the Bell' moments in skydiving, but he has a special skill that isn't widely known about. Fitch used to be a bell-ringer! Yep, he'd stand in church towers, pulling on ropes with perfect timing, to make music for the faithful.

But, despite all that time in churches during his younger days, Fitch wasn't a believer. He even got booted out of one Vicar's tower because he downright refused to attend his service.

He hasn't lost the skill since those days. One evening, as he wandered around Melbourne sightseeing with his wife Sue Rodwell (also a brilliant photographer, by the way), they heard church bells. Steve took off towards the sound and found the church, persuading a reluctant Sue to follow him in the back door and up the tower. He had a very pleasant night ringing the bells again, as if he'd never stopped!

THE ART OF THE IMAGE...

Australia's original flying photographer, Andy Keech, used to dream up unusual images in his sleep in the sixties and seventies. He would sketch his ideas on a notepad beside his bed, and then he'd round up the right jumpers to make the shot a reality. In those days, a camera opportunity was rare, and skydivers would line up for a chance to be part of a precious image.

Fitch doesn't quite get to manage the shots in the same way nowadays. Not only are there many cameras on every load already, but he's generally working for an event for a specific purpose. *"I like to think I can read the light and know where to be to get the shot they want,"* he explains. *"I seem to be good at capturing a moment when it's presented, but it's rare for me to get the chance to set up specific shoots."*

As a young jumper in the 80s, Fitch grew up on Andy's 'Skies Call' books and spent many bad weather days admiring his work. Now he's honoured to discover the admiration is mutual. Andy and Fitch have an email friendship, where they pick each other's brains about all things photographic. Andy has challenged Fitch to create a particular image from a skydive that he wasn't able to pull off forty or fifty years ago. Of course, Fitch needs to find a moment or two in his calendar to make it happen. But, it'll be a beauty when it does! A bit like pinning down a rainbow.





STEVE FITCHETT'S SHOWREEL

- 2014** Aussie Bigway Camp at Toogoolawah
- 2015** I'm a Celebrity - Get Me Out of Here (Reality TV Show - UK Version)
- 2015** Australian CRW 44-way Record
- 2016** I'm a Celebrity - Get Me Out of Here (Reality TV Show - UK Version)
- 2016** Aussie Bigway Sequential Record at Nagambie
- 2017** Australian Nationals - Media Camera
- 2017** Aussie Bigway Sequential Record at Moruya
- 2017** Aussie Bigway Sequential Record at York
- 2017** Parabatics CRW Camp
- 2017** C17 WIAS day and Legacy jumps
- 2017** I'm a Celebrity - Get Me Out of Here (German Version)
- 2018** Australian Nationals - Media Camera
- 2018** Aussie Bigway Sequential Record at Toogoolawah
- 2018** World Parachute Championships – Media Camera
- 2019** Magic Millions demo – Gold Coast

Numerous ASM covers, boogies and weekend events

