

PROFILE



CORNELIA MIHAI

By Jonn Connolly

I RECENTLY TRAVELLED TO NEW ZEALAND TO ATTEND THE JYRO BOOGIE AT SKYDIVE AUCKLAND (SO MUCH FUN WAS HAD!). WHILST I WAS THERE I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ROCK STAR OF CANOPY PILOTING; **CORNELIA MIHAI!**

She's one inspiring individual, with a mantra of setting goals and smashing them; Cornelia hosted a canopy course during the lead up to the boogie, and then joined in on all the freefly, angle and XRW jumps that she could at the main event (I can still hear the roar of those first-class canopies jetting by!).

Now that the boogie madness has subsided, I've managed to get some time to pick her brains and provide you with an insight into the life of one of the world's best pilots;

You currently reside in Dubai; when did you first move there and what sparked the move?

I moved to Dubai in 2012. I participated at DIPC 3 (Dubai International Parachuting Championships) in 2011 and I was really impressed with the location and the facilities, so when I was offered a job there I had to try it.

How did you first become interested in high performance canopy piloting?

I've always liked flying my canopy so when my only option to attend DIPC 3 was either competing in canopy piloting or classic accuracy, I went for canopy piloting ;) I had no idea what I was getting myself into but it turned out to become my passion.

In all the years of jumping you must have had some hard times along with the good times; what keeps you going in the sport?

I love the endless possibilities of learning and improving yourself. I am very driven to become the best that I can be, and I always set new goals. I also love the lifestyle and the community, so diverse but with so much in common.

What has been your greatest frustration when breaking into elite level canopy piloting?

I think at some point I was getting frustrated with the judging and the luck or the bad luck of the weather conditions... But with time and competition experience I've learned that this is the game we all play and sometimes we get luckier than others and some other times it is the other way around. I've also learned that the judges can make mistakes (not on purpose) because sometimes it's hard to see mistakes when things are happening so fast.

What is your super power?

I don't think I have superpowers. I just set goals, work hard and enjoy the road trying to achieve them.

Growing up in Romania, what was your childhood dream?

I wanted to become a vet, I always loved animals.

What sacrifices have you made to pursue elite canopy piloting, and if you had your time again what would you change?

I don't feel that I have made sacrifices... I just do what I need to do, to achieve what I've put my mind to. For sure I gave up a lot of my free time and time that I could spend with my friends. Currently I work five days a week at Skydive Dubai and in my two days off I go and train so I spend every day at the drop zone. I also use my holidays to go and compete so I'm quite a busy person. Luckily, I am sharing my life with someone that understands me and supports me.

PROFILE CORNELIA MIHAI

What is your training regime before and after a big event?

I train as much as I can, especially if the event is in a new place. Training gives me information about the location; the weather conditions and how my parachute flies, so the more I train the better. I don't stop! After the competition I take it easy for a while and I usually take a break because I need to allow my body to recover a bit (going for distance hurts most of the times).

There were some outstanding canopy pilots at the Jyro Boogie; Nick Batsch, Noah Bahnson and yourself included; who would you say is your most influential mentor in the sport and why?

Funny you actually named these two.

I have to say I heard about Nick Batsch even before I ever thought of competing in Canopy Piloting. I saw a video of him setting a world record and I was impressed. Even now, after knowing him and competing against him, he still impresses with his technique. For a while, during my Distance training, even if I had a good jump I would say to myself: "Nick would land 20m further".

Noah Bahnson will always impress me with how badass he is in everything that he does but he manages to stay so humble!

What has been your greatest achievement in Canopy Piloting?

Becoming a World Champion in Distance at the World Cup in Canada (2015) and at the World Air Games in Dubai (2015). I am also very proud of winning the US Nationals in 2016 (as a guest of course)... I think it's one of the hardest competitions out there.

You've been jumping for more than 16 years; what is the greatest technological change that you have seen in your years in the sport?

The canopy design for sure; I remember when I jumped a Petra for the first time... it was something else! It's crazy to see how the canopies and wingsuits have evolved and we are able to do XRW. Also, the electronics (audible, digital altimeters...). When I did my first jumps (Static Line in Romania) I didn't even have an altimeter so times have changed for the better for sure.



You're flying NZ Aerosports canopies, what is it about their canopies that appeals to you?

When I saw that video of Nick Batsch setting a world record I told myself "I will fly a Petra one day", and the moment I did, I fell in love. I think my flying style also suits the Petra and I respect NZ Aerosports a lot. I think they are pushing the sport forward in a very honest and open way, you can tell they are very passionate about what they do, and it's not only a business. It's a family that loves flying and pushing the limits!

What advice do you have for novices who are interested in canopy piloting?

I think nowadays canopy piloting has evolved a lot and there is a lot more knowledge out there to make it safer. So, I'm not necessarily saying "go get coaching" but I do recommend to ask a lot of questions and be informed about the best and safest way to get into canopy piloting. Don't rush, it's only going to take longer if you get hurt!

After how many jumps did you try your first 270 landing, and how did it go?

I probably did my first ever 270 quite late because I did my first 700 jumps in Romania and I didn't have access to a lot of knowledge at the time. I probably did my first ever 270 when I had almost 1,000 jumps. I asked around the drop zone (Skydive Empuriabrava – Spain) for advice and help and the only one who was willing to teach me was Dennis Praet (now a World Champion in FS). He tried to explain the technique to me, but eventually he ended up saying "Just follow me"... so we went up for a hop'n'pop and I followed him on landing doing a 270. It was awesome!

What is your worst injury from skydiving?

I have never been injured from skydiving. I do have a sore tailbone most of the time from landing in Distance but that's about it.

What are your hobbies/favourite weather hold activities?

Stand up paddling, indoor rock climbing, going to the cinema, walking on the beach, chilling... :)

Best song for a skydiving video?

I think the trends have changed a bit since I started skydiving. I like "Up in the Sky" by 77 Bombay Street, but I think canopy piloting needs something a bit more aggressive.



Funniest memory at a drop zone?

Skydiving gave me a lot of funny memories for sure, from when one of my AFF students who showed up in a very, very baggy suit saying he wants to work towards wingsuiting already and the rescue divers by the pond who were ready for me to jump during my first ever Canopy Piloting competition.

What is your current goal in the sport?

I want to become an Overall Canopy Piloting World Champion (I've managed to win in Distance before but not overall). I will get my chance to fight for it in July at the World Championship in Wroclaw, Poland. I would also love to get on the podium at a Freestyle competition.

You say you like making plans... what will you do after skydiving (Is there even such a thing!)?

For sure I would love to stay in the sport for as long as possible, it's in my blood by now, but it could be that at some point life will take me on a different path. I can't make plans that far ahead. I will just follow my dreams and try to do what makes me happy.



SKYDIVER PROFILE

Nickname: I don't think I have one although Ian Drennan called me "Romanian Devil Witch" once

Age: 33

Home Town: Ploiesti, Romania

Number of Jumps: 11,000+

Discipline: Canopy Piloting

First jump: August 2002

Home DZ: Skydive Dubai

Sponsors: Icarus Canopies by NZ Aerosports, UPT, Cypres, Liquid Sky Sports, LB Altimeters, Skydive Dubai

Records:

Current Female Distance World Record: 165.10m

Current Female Speed World Record: 2.289s (I am aiming to get the general World Records though, not just the female category)

Best Performance in Competition:

Speed: 2.208s (DISL 1, Dubai, November 2014)

Distance: 166.49m (French Nationals, September 2016)

ACHIEVEMENTS:

9th FAI World Cup (Dubai, 2017) – **Silver Medal Overall**

US Nationals (Raeford, 2017) – **2nd Place**

The World Games (Poland, 2017) – **Bronze Medal**

Italian Nationals (Ravenna, 2017) – **1st Place**

Australian Nationals (York, 2017) – **1st Place**

French Nationals (Orleans, 2016) – **1st Place**

6th FAI World Championship (Canada, 2016) – **Bronze Medal in Speed (the event wasn't completed due to weather)**

Pink Open (Czech Republic, 2016) – **2nd Place**

World Games Test Event (Poland, 2016) – **1st Place**

Italian Nationals (Ravenna, 2016) – **1st Place**

US Nationals (Z-hills, 2016) – **1st Place**

DISL 3 (Dubai, March 2016) – **1st Place**

DISL 2 (Dubai, January 2016) – **3rd Place**

World Air Games (Dubai, 2015) – **Bronze Medal Overall, Gold Medal in Distance, Bronze Medal in Speed**

8th FAI World Cup (Canada, 2015) – **Gold Medal in Distance**

Pink Open (Czech Republic, 2015) – **2nd Place**

FLCPA 3(Raeford USA, 2015) – **1st Place**

DISL 1(Dubai, 2014) – **3rd Place**

PD Tveir (Z-hills, 2014) – **1st place (Team Halla Walla with Patrick Kaye)**

5th FAI World Championships (Z-hills, 2014) – **Bronze Medal (First woman to ever win a medal at a Canopy Piloting World Championship)**

French Nationals (Toulouse France, 2014) – **3rd Place**

Pink Open (Czech Republic, 2014) – **3rd Place**

US Nationals (Z-hills, 2014) – **3rd Place**

FLCPA 5(Florida USA, 2014) – **3rd Place**

RSA Nationals (Pretoria, 2014) – **1st Place**

DISL 4(Dubai, 2014) – **2nd Place**

DIPC 4 (Dubai, 2013) – **Bronze Medal in Speed**

CANOPY PROGRESSION:

Canopy	Size	Jumps
Manta	290	100
Parafoil	252	70
Sabre 2	135	250
Katana	107	1000
Velocity	111	10
Velocity	96	10
Velocity	90	20
Velocity	84	700
Comp Velocity	79	800
Comp Velocity	75	500
NZ Aerosports Petra	72	1500
NZ Aerosports Petra	66	300
NZ Aerosports Petra	64	1200
NZ Aerosports Sophia	61	500
NZ Aerosports Leia	68	800