

ISOBEL WHEELER

PROFILE

By Isabella Lipinski



WHY DID YOU START SKYDIVING? It was one of those things that I always wanted to do. I would see it on the TV and think WOW that's pretty cool. There was also a whole bunch of guys from my home town in Gisbon who were skydiving and I would see their footage. I've been horse riding since I was 12 and I had just sold a horse for \$2,000 which in turn ended up paying for my skydiving course. What I find interesting is that equestrian sports are one of the only sports that allow men and women to compete on equal terms. Women actually have an advantage because we don't need to use brute strength against a horse. That is also what I have found in skydiving - men and women compete on equal terms. I am attracted to sports like that.

DESCRIBE YOUR FIRST JUMP? I was at Corowa in November and it was freezing cold. I had to wait around for ages due to the wind. I did a static line jump with Alison Quick as my instructor, from 4,000ft. There were about five of us on the course. I remember when the door opened I thought, wow the wind is strong out there, but I was excited. I listened to Alison and out I climbed and it was all WOW! I remember landing on my butt in a puddle. I was hooked after that. I was ecstatic for the next two weeks and I couldn't stop talking about it.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BEST JUMP? This is a really hard one because there are so many good jumps for so many different reasons. There's the jump I did at the Go Tropo Boogie in Tully where there were these big thunderhead clouds. Jon King, Buck, Roger Mulckey and I dumped at height and flew around all these clouds and the valleys they produced. When we landed I was just thinking how beautiful that was. Then other jumps stick out in my mind such as the first time I caught a skyball. Then there are the picturesque places like Mexico and Barwon Heads where I remember doing eagles with Pony and using the coastline as a reference point. Also, Arizona comes to mind where we were doing 4-ways and turning pieces when freefly took off. Then there are the hybrid jumps that we did during Christmas at Picton last year where we were just laughing so much turning points. It is really hard to pick a best jump. There are a lot of cool ones though.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR SCARIEST JUMP? I have had a couple especially pre cypres days. There is the one where I was doing camera for a 50-way at Toogoolawah. I was filming underneath on my back and Robin Poole was filming from above. The plan was for the base to break off at around 5,000ft. Robin and I planned to come together at the end of the jump where I was supposed to film him dumping and then I was going to turn over and dump. What in actual fact happened was the base kept turning points and I was underneath thinking this is my space guys. I watched Robin pitch, the base tracked off and as I turned over I saw a canopy coming up from someone who had been in the base, completed a banana track and was now underneath me. So as I turned over I had to track over the top of this canopy. I pitched and opened lower than planned, swinging at about 1,400ft.

As a world female freefly record holder, current Australian freefly record holder, freefly tutor, camera chick, swooper and new tandem instructor, Isobel Wheeler is vibrant, fun, focused, approachable and without a doubt, cool. She believes when you push yourself to learn, that's when it all starts happening and that egos only build brick walls. Our home grown Issy has a positive energy that is truly infectious. Not only do chicks think she's cool, guys do too. Versatility is her skydiving trademark, where equality meets with quality.

DOB: 19/10/1971

Container: Mirage

Canopies: Velocity 84, PD 113 Reserve

Number of jumps: 3,500

First Jump: Corowa, 1992

Marital Status: Running Brian (Brown) Dore

Skydiving Qualifications: Freefly Tutor, Tandem Instructor, Camera Flyer

Current Home DZ: Tully

Occupation: Full-Time Skydiver, Tandems, Camera, driving the bus, answering the phone

Malfunctions: 3

Hobbies: Bush walking, spear fishing, reading in a hammock, anything outdoors

First water swoop on Sabre 120, Elsinore 2000



Issy & Shauna Spencer at Skysisters



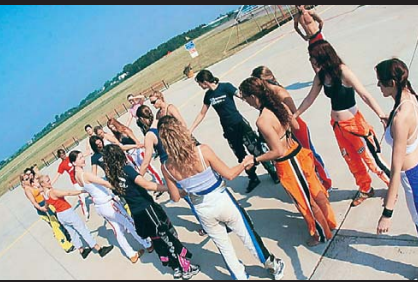
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Balloon jump at Eloy



Womens World Record, Chicago 2005



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Another scary jump was when I was in France trying out speed skydiving for the first time. I approached the gun of speed skydiving at the time for some tips. He just said, "here is a dytter, put it on your leg and see how fast you can go." I was like OK then. So out I went speed skydiving thinking yeah this is pretty cool. No one told me that I probably wouldn't hear my audible in my crappy oversized helmet, or that because of the speeds you gain from pinning it that you are supposed to pull out of the speed early in order to slow down. I ended up opening at 900ft, lucky I didn't have a cypres then either. I remember looking at the ground knowing I was going to be OK, knowing I was in the basement and thinking oh there is a nice patch of green grass down there if that's where I am going to go in. So I am lucky I didn't die on that one from lack of information. I am lucky I didn't die learning those things.

Also, another one that comes to mind is when I was doing a freefly coach jump with Mad Cow and he was in a stand up and I was in the head down position. I remember thinking just before he wobbled and hit me that I shouldn't be here, he corked and bang, I was taken out, blacked out for a second and really dizzy. When I landed I thought now is the time I get a Cypres, I have had enough warnings. I won't jump without one now. So I guess I have been pretty lucky.

HAVE YOU HAD ANY BROKEN BONES?

Yeah, I broke my leg when I had 90 jumps. I was going for my 'C' Licence focusing on accuracy and I got total target fixation. It was a combination of inexperience and uncurrency. I didn't see it coming. I guess I was a bit of a slow starter. It took me four years to make 100 jumps. I went to Japan for 18 months but after 9 months off healing from my broken leg that's when I pretty much got the bug for skydiving.

HOW MANY COUNTRIES HAVE YOU BEEN TO SKYDIVING? France, Germany, Mexico, Spain, New Zealand, England and I have spent a lot of time in the USA. I went to Eloy, Arizona because I had the opportunity to go and it was the mecca with great skydivers. I wanted to travel and I had a round the world ticket so I

ensured my stops would coincide with boogies. Travelling is good as it broadens your horizons. I think you tend to get comfortable at your own home DZ so it is good for you to push yourself out of your comfort zone and be challenged. If you're comfortable I believe you aren't learning enough.

WHAT IS YOUR COMPETITION EXPERIENCE?

- 1999 - 8th place World Meet Womens Freestyle as Cameraflyer
- 2000 - Gold Freely Money Meet Eloy Arizona.
- 2000/2001 - 2nd place - Freely Australian Champs
- 2001 - 11th place World Air Games Freely Spain with team *Buzz*.
- 2003 - 3rd place Intermediate Canopy Piloting Nationals
- 2005 - 4th place Moruya Swoop Competition
- 2005 - Gold North Queensland Parachute Champs

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE ASPECTS OF SKYDIVING?

Freefly and the people. The thing I love about freeflying is that sometimes you will be in a formation in the sky and it feels like you are just hanging out, standing around the bar. I definitely love the people, the free spirits, the free thinking. Yeah, the people are a definite draw card. Swooping is a favourite aspect too.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FREEFLY MOVE?

That's difficult to narrow down. I like eagles, diving, atmonauti, sky ball jumps and transitions. It's all good!

HOW DO YOU FIND BIG WAY FREEFLYING?

I love them. That's how I learnt how to fly. When I was in Eloy I was tight on cash and packing so what I did was outside camera, flying out way wide. Then I started moving in closer and closer and then eventually I was asked to come in on the formations and started taking docks. Big ways are like home for me. Its good being with a bunch of people getting a team group vibe happening. It is a different style of flying, requiring different sets of skills when compared to 2-way flying. Big ways require disciplined flying.

100th jump, at Corowa



World Air Games Spain 2001



Farm 2004



To get on big ways you need to get amongst it. Learn how to dive, learn how to float, learn how to be still in a base. Big way freeflying is about being versatile. I am in a good position where I can turn up at a record attempt and the organiser can delegate me to any slot and I can say, "yes, I can do that". You need to be an all round flyer.

WHAT MADE YOU GET INTO TANDEM SKYDIVING? Handy Cams! The fact of the matter is you cannot make a living in Cairns skydiving doing outside camera jumps. It was purely an economic decision.

HOW ARE YOU FINDING BEING A TANDEM MASTER? It's interesting and I wonder what my response will be in a few more hundred tandem jumps. Right now the canopy side of things is challenging because I have to turn so low but I am developing the right sight picture. The freefall side of things is pretty cool. I am enjoying it.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST SKYDIVING ACHIEVEMENT? I could name a few but I reckon the biggest one for me is that I am a chick and I am walking the walk. I am not asking for chicks to be given special treatment but rather doing what the boys can do. What makes me most proud is when a chick comes up to me and says "Hey Issy, I saw you walk out to the plane with all the boys and it's made me think if you can do it, so can I." So for me that's an achievement.

TELL US ABOUT THE SKYSISTERS EVENT AND THE WORLD FEMALE FREEFLY RECORD ATTEMPTS. It was amazing! When Susie rang me up about the Skysisters event I was thinking it was going to be either really good or really bad. It turned out to be one of the best boogies I have been too. It was so open and positive with lots of questions, learning and absorbing info. It was great to see so many chicks having a great time and skydiving their asses off. The world record attempt in Chicago was very different. If you didn't perform well then you were axed. I learnt about how to organise an event and how important the mental factor is, particularly in big ways. There were a lot of girls who could freefly really well but weren't mentally ready. I went over there expecting to learn a lot but I actually didn't learn what I thought I would. We ended up building an 18-way.

HOW AND WHY DID YOU GET INTO SWOOPING? Robbie McMillan was my inspiration. I recall turning up at Picton with 300 jumps and seeing Robbie hooning through the landing area with his end cell nearly touching the ground. I walked up to Robbie and asked him how can I learn to do that. He sang back R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Since then, I just set little goals and chipped away at them. I jumped more, downsized and got to jump at the Farm where there is a pond. I asked the guys for advice and information and they were really helpful. The info is there, just ask. It's a cool way to get your heart going.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FELLOW SISTER SWOOPERS?

We have an advantage as women because we don't have that pressure or ego factor like guys do. We can be as gay as we want when we are landing. We are in a perfect position with swooping because no one expects us to, so the pressure is off. Don't let the ego get in the way and ask questions.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS STAYED THE SAME OR CONSTANT IN SKYDIVING?

Picton DZ.

WHAT AREA OF SKYDIVING DO YOU THINK NEEDS IMPROVEMENT?

I think customer service needs brushing up. People stay in the sport because of the people in the sport. If everyone takes it upon themselves to look out for one new person on the DZ, like a mentoring system, then we will have a higher retention rate.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FELLOW SKYDIVERS?

Jump lots on this journey. It is not about how good or bad you are but about what you learn. The reason I have been skydiving for 14 years is because I never, ever stop learning. I set little goal posts for myself and as I meet each challenge I think, what's the next one? It's a constant state of learning. The journey is important as are the people around you. There is never a stupid question. Always ask that question and don't let your ego get in the way.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FEMALE SKYDIVERS?

Just get in there and do it. Don't be scared. Females tend to be conservative but that's good because it keeps you alive.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY?

Get out and fun jump. Keep your passion for skydiving alive.

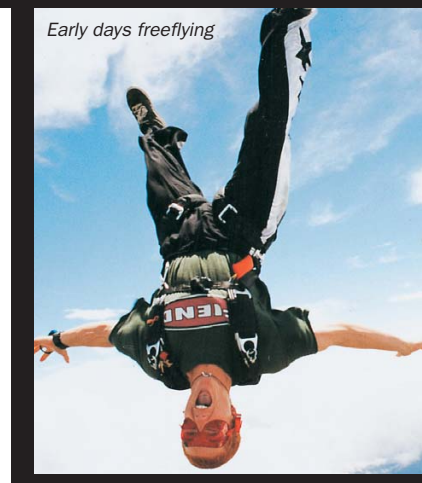
JUMPING PHILOSOPHY?

Have fun, keep learning and run.



Atmonauti at Equinox 04

Photo: Ready



Early days freeflying



Izzy & Bronnie, Round 1 1999 World Champs at Corowa

Photo: Shane Sparkes



Sonic Boom Gold, Buzz Silver, 01/02 Nationals