

A visit to the danger zone a dream come true

By BRYAN LITTLELY

"I FEEL the need, the need for SPEED."

A line from the 1986 action movie *Top Gun*, it is the catchphrase of a generation of teenage boys and fuelled the dreams of many who aspired to become jet fighter pilots.

Sadly, for me and a bunch of mates who repeated those words whenever our antics involved some kind of velocity, we all confused our aspirations with our abilities.

Now, Australian Jet Adventures, a Ballarat-based company, has touched down at Goolwa Airport for four days to make those boyhood dreams a reality.

At a minimum of \$1450 for 25 minutes of engine time, including 15 minutes of mind-blowing, high-speed aerial acrobatics, a BAC 167 Strikemaster jet fighter flight is not for the faint-hearted.

"We get some people along who have bought the Ray Bans so they can look like Tom Cruise when flying," Strikemaster owner and pilot Darren De Roia said.

"Those who have taken flights love it and less than 5 per cent are actually sick."

Shades on, parachute packed and helmet in hand, I looked the part, I am sure. The perfect wingman, so what if he was called Goose in the movie.

More than 30 minutes of pre-flight briefings had prepared me for what was to come: "Keep your eyes open, look straight ahead, this is how you get out, that releases your parachute".

The beads of sweat, shallow breathing and clenched fists were common, I was told - just before the engine was fired up. Pilot De Roia gave one last command before take off: "Don't touch anything."

Touch anything? When you're



ALTITUDE: The view of the Murray Mouth as the Strikemaster jet fighter completes a loop at 600km/h.

pulling four gees you can't even lift your arms.

At one point, while zooming along at 600km/h in a loop over the Murray Mouth, I quickly went from feeling as though my vital organs were in my feet to wondering whether they were about to come out of my ears.

Fortunately, I had no use for the sick bag my pre-flight assistant Christine Segart had shoved into the pocket of my flight suit.

There was no way I would have been able to hold it to my face.

Within minutes of taking off,

the pilot had taken me through an array of aerobatic tricks - barrel rolls, loops and derri rolls.

Soon, we were on our way back to the airstrip and landing safely.

My flight lasted only a few minutes, but dozens of prospective jet fighter flyers are lining up for longer flights.

"We have one 65-year-old lady booked in on Sunday," Ms Segart said.

Australian Jet Adventures will operate flights from today to Sunday and bookings can be made by phoning 0417 142 227.



NEED FOR SPEED: Bryan Littlely and pilot Darren De Roia prepare for take-off at Goolwa Airport.

Picture: BARRY O'BRIEN