

TOP GUN

Joy flights



Looking for a top-flight prezzie for the person who's done it all? Why not rent your own BAC 167 Strikemaster jet?

FLYING HIGH: This coastal view, near Barwon Heads in Victoria, is magic.



G-WHIZZ: David McKenna, a happy flier.



BREATHE EASY: Pilot Al Page gives a supersonic view of Ballarat.

They bill it as the aerobic flight of a lifetime ... a daredevil ride in an ex-military Strikemaster aircraft high over the Victorian coastline.

The Geelong-based company that offers the 25-minute, \$1200 joyflights – Australian Jet Adventures – creates an overwhelming experience.

Passengers don a flight suit, parachute and fighter pilot helmet before being strapped into position right next to the pilot.

According to pilot Darren Derola, there's no better way to get close to the action.

"The side-by-side seating is great. You're up front with the pilot so you can really see what's going on and then once we've gone through the basic manoeuvres you can have a shot at flying the plane," he says.

Darren has been flying Strikemasters for three years now.

"There's just no comparison between this and any other aeroplane.

The freedom and three dimensional visibility is amazing, they're very flexible and they're great for aerobics.

"We do barrel rolls, loops and air combat manoeuvres. It's huge adrenaline rush."

Passengers who have already taken the plunge include an 18-year-old celebrating her birthday and an 80-year-old man who has always wanted to fly.

"He was a bit nervous, everyone is," says Darren. "Some people aren't quite sure what to expect, and you hear a few expletives and feel the occasional grab of your leg but once you're in the air most people just love it."

Passengers are fully briefed on safety and spend time examining maps and discussing the route, altitude and timing of the flight before take off.

The cabin is pressurised and climate controlled to ensure maximum comfort but, be warned, the 3700-plus kW jet engine can climb through 10,000 feet in two minutes at speeds of up to 800km/h.

"I've had a couple of people throw up, but that's because they drank huge milkshakes beforehand. The trick is to have a small amount of food in your stomach or the adrenaline makes you ill."

"It's also best to keep your eyes open while you're in the air to stop feeling dizzy. Once you're up, sit back and enjoy the ride," says Darren.

Tina Luton

● Adventure flights depart seven days a week from Ballarat Airport. There are three packages to choose from, starting with a 25-minute flight at \$1200 per person. The 30-minute package costs \$1450 per person and the 35-minute package costs \$1700 per person.

For more information call 03 5250 3181, or visit www.austjetadv.com.

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