



The Black Sea isn't black at all. It's as blue as my language and the sky that I fall from as I hurtle towards it, a g-force of seven melding me with my seat as though I were being buried underneath a ton of wet sand. I want to shut my eyes but I can't, the speed of my descent holds them open. My face, seven times its normal weight, climbs down my skull. My flesh is kneaded by invisible hands. The world is getting closer and closer, spinning at a blurred velocity. My brain prepares to be shut down.

This is what it feels like when you are about to die. And suddenly the pilot pulls back on the throttle and points the buzzing nose of our angry metal hornet back towards the sky, propelling us from a few hundred feet above the ocean to 3,000 in just over a minute. Then he flips it. We're upside down, a negative g-force of three, my eyes trying to escape from their sockets, my tongue from my mouth, my mind from reality. And then we

plateau. The fear of death washed away by relief. My hands are dark bruises where I grip so hard they ache. There is a crackle in my headset. 'Again?' he asks. 'Yes! Again,' I nod.

This is an insensitively named crash course in aerobatics, an experience of physical extremes that can only be topped by a trip into space. We are in Constanta, on the south coast of Romania, at an airfield called Tuzla, or more accurately tearing through the morning air just above it. Constanta is the latest location to be added to next year's Aero GP series, a fledgling but growing and unique multi-discipline motor sport that takes place in the sky. Up to eight airplanes race circuits in some of the most beautiful locations on earth, recreating the dogfights of the Second World War, spiralling around each other as low as 10ft

above ground and travelling at 250mph. They even drop real bombs on targets floating in the sea. It's where dambusters meets video games, and as a spectacle it is amazing.

Before I'd climbed aboard my craft, a two-seater Extra 300L piloted by a stony Slovenian called Igor, I'd asked Aero GP's managing director Jeff Zaltman, what to expect. He broke it to me gently. 'We operate in a third dimension that most sports don't and that brings

just as he straps my emergency parachute to my back.

'Don't worry,' he says, 'I wrote the book on aerobatics.' A quick check on Amazon later confirms that he actually did. Regardless, I keep my hand as close as possible to the ripcord on my chest.

'Oh,' he then warns me, 'if you do have to pull that, it's going to hurt. It's not a normal parachute, it's an emergency

g-forces into play. The strains on the body are intense. Our pilots will pull more g-forces than an aviator in a dogfight. The training they have to go through takes years. When they are pulling these levels of gs, often as much as nine or ten, the pressure on the body is huge. If your head weighs 5lbs now, it will weigh 50lbs in that plane. Now imagine having to turn your 50lb head to look out for other planes while flying at 250mph - faster than a Formula One car racing 10ft feet from the ground - while your body is so heavy it hurts to move... it takes a rare person to be able to deal with that.'

I am quite rightly concerned that I won't be one of said rarities and choose to ask Igor, a pilot for some 20 years and an aerobatics specialist for 11, how confident he is that it's a safe pursuit -

one. On the plus side, that means you can pull it at 20ft from the ground and it will open in time for you to live. On the downside, it opens so fast it will feel like you've had your spine ripped from your back, so...

'You'll know when to pull it,' he adds helpfully, 'because, if it needs pulling, I will already have jumped out of the plane!'

Igor proceeds to perform a series of mid-air manoeuvres, starting with what he calls a 'basic' loop-the-loop. Slowly, the g-forces get higher and higher, churning my insides, making it so that I can't lift my heavy arms to press the emergency button. But, despite all this, it is truly brilliant.

Then, at 2,400ft, the engine suddenly goes silent, we're back at the start of this story, the plane is pointed at the ground so that, as we hurtle towards it, I can see nothing but the planet I was born on speeding towards me as I meteor helplessly closer and closer to the ground. 'Never again,' I lie to myself.