

1931  
Grandfather Auguste Piccard is the first human to fly into the stratosphere.

1934  
Great-aunt Josette Piccard sets the women's altitude record in a gondola designed by Auguste.

MARCH 1938  
Bertrand Victor Auguste Piccard is born in Luxembourg, Switzerland.

1944  
Bertrand's father, Jacques, sets the depth record for ocean diving: 35,840 feet, into the Mariana Trench, the lowest known point on Earth.

1944  
Legendary pilot Hermann Geiger flies Piccard around the Muttenthal.

1982  
Starts jumping from balloons in a hang glider, his first solo flying experience.

1993  
Enters first balloon race, the Chrysler Trans-Atlantic Challenge. He and Belgian copilot Wim Verstraeten win.

1997  
Makes first around-the-world attempt with Verstraeten. Just after takeoff, a serene sea leak floods the gondola floor and they are forced to abort the flight.

1998  
During another around-the-world try, Piccard and copilot Andy Elson stay aloft for 9 days and 18 hours, setting a duration record.

MARCH 23, 1999  
In breeding Orbiter 3, Piccard and copilot Brian Jones leave Châteaufort d'Oex, in the Swiss Alps, for a third attempt. Below, their cabin.

MARCH 23, 1999  
Piccard and Jones cross the finish line in Mauritania at longitude 9 degrees 27 minutes west, becoming the first balloonists to circumnavigate the globe; they finally land (below) 45 miles north of Mali, Egypt.



HIGH TIMES: Bertrand Piccard arriving in Geneva after his circumnavigation of the globe, March 1999 (opposite page). Above, from left: Auguste Piccard demonstrates an airtight pressurized cabin to Amelia Earhart, 1927; Bertrand waves from breeding Orbiter 2 before his launch from Châteaufort d'Oex, Switzerland.

# Bertrand Piccard practices self-hypnosis. He speaks openly about beauty and dreams and about why the adrenaline

rush is not something that interests him. He didn't "conquer" nature, he says. Rather, the 41-year-old Swiss psychiatrist calls his circumnavigation of the world in a balloon this past March a metaphor for life: "You can't always go where you wish. The wind pushes you. Sometimes to explore you have to go with the elements."

Bertrand was not the first Piccard to enter the books. In 1931, his grandfather, Auguste, aboard an airtight gondola of his own design, was the first man to reach the stratosphere by balloon, ascending more than 50,000 feet above the earth. In 1960, his father, Jacques, descended 35,840 feet to the deepest point in the world's oceans, the Mariana Trench, in a bathyscaph also invented by Auguste.

Some say that being the first balloonist to circle the globe was Bertrand Piccard's destiny. Still, he didn't set his sights on the goal until 1992, after he helped Belgian balloonist Wim Verstraeten win the Chrysler Trans-Atlantic Challenge, a race from Maine to Europe. Before then, balloons were just a way to feed his passion for hang gliding aerobatics, as he launched himself from gondolas. Piccard was asked to join the Belgian team as much for his talent at self-hypnosis—a way to remain alert during the five-day race—as for his ballooning skills. "It was such a fantastic experience to spend five days and nights inside the wind," he says. "I started to dream about going all the way around the world, not just across the Atlantic."

From 1981 to 1999, nearly two dozen around-the-world

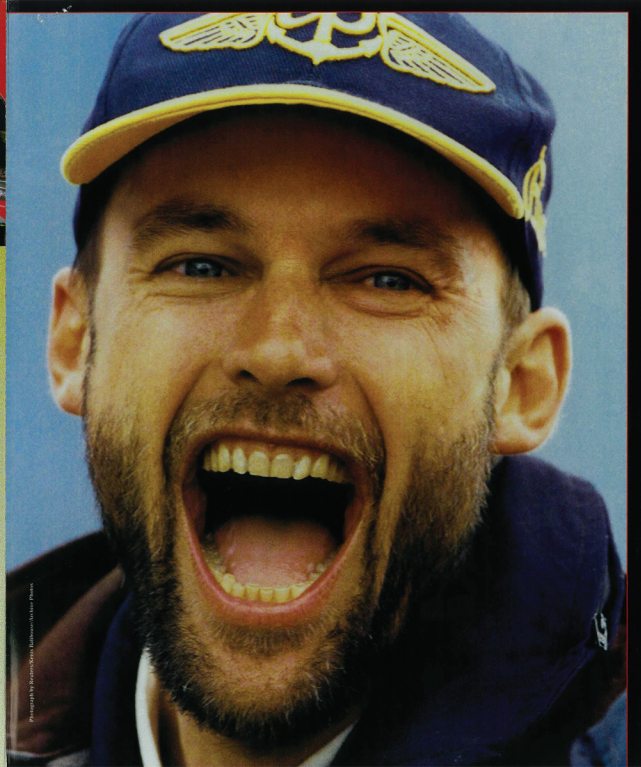
attempts failed, two of them made by Piccard. His first defeat occurred only six hours after liftoff, when a fuel leak forced Piccard and copilot Verstraeten to ditch in the Mediterranean Sea. "It inoculated me," Piccard explains, laughing. "Once you have appeared as stupid as that in front of the entire world, you don't care anymore. You are free."

By Piccard's third attempt, everything had jelled: He had a new copilot—Brian Jones, a former Royal Air Force helicopter pilot. He had permission to fly over China, the lack of which had contributed to the abandonment of his second attempt, in 1998. And he had a crack ground crew of logisticians and meteorologists. After nearly three

weeks aloft in the propane-tank-enshrouded capsule of *Breeding Orbiter 3*, Piccard and Jones, cold, exhausted, and suffering from the onset of pulmonary edema, crossed the "finish line" over western Africa—longitude 9 degrees 27 minutes west—and then kept going, landing on a barren stretch of sand in Egypt. Their journey shattered records, not just for ballooning but for all means of flight: for distance (25,361 miles) and duration (19 days, 21 hours, 47 minutes).

Less than a year after the *Orbiter 3* touched down, Piccard finds it difficult to think about the next great adventure. Married with three daughters, he has kept his day job as a psychiatrist, sharing with his patients what he has learned about himself. "Some people are afraid of the unknown. They hate doubt. They hate mystery," he says. "To me, what is beautiful in life is doubt and mystery."

**BERTRAND PICCARD**  
25,361 MILES AROUND THE WORLD IN A BALLOON, AND, AT 41, HE'S JUST GETTING STARTED



PHOTOGRAPHY: JONAS MEYER/LEICA; BALLOONING: JACQUES PICCARD; BALLOONING: WIM VERSTRAETEN; BALLOONING: BERTRAND PICCARD

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