

Using just the rear risers Mike Kung manoeuvres the glider with accuracy without producing lift. All photos: Giorgio Sabbioni



ON THE ROCKS

Ice cool Mad Mike goes out to play while Giorgio Sabbioni looks on

“Follow me ... then you'll see what is possible.” This was Mike Kung, Germany's master of aerial madness, and he was talking to me as he unfolded his glider next to the rocky lava seashore of the appropriately named Puento del Diablo, the Devil's Bridge.

The tarmac road was the only clean place to inflate, so Mike, famous throughout the paragliding world for his acrobatics and extreme stunts, lifted his wing up, said Hello to a passing cyclist and then hopped off into the rocks, to walk tens of metres towards the cliff edge.

The wind wasn't so strong, but the waves less than 10 m below were crashing against the steep basalt rocks. I know Mike and his reputation, and I knew he wouldn't take off unless he considered it safe, but still, when he launched off the rocks towards the waves I was scared for him. The lift was weak, there were no landing places, the rocks were unfriendly and the waves were big.

But instead of crashing into the sea and drowning he soared towards me using lift created by the waves to stay above the water, but still

flying lower than the cliff edge. Then, just like a humming bird he landed on a foot-sized platform on the cliff. The next instant he took a few steps and took off again.

He did it once more, and then again, playing touch and go along the tiny cliff and he looked as if he was enjoying it. Personally, I wasn't, but there to shoot pictures, I carried on taking photos.

Watching, I felt the same way as I did when I saw the first Infinite Tumble ever executed: pure technical ability was being used to create a show-stopper. The risk and possibility of error were so high that the whole performance was more than extreme.

It was our first day in Lanzarote and we were there for Mike to perform some extreme ground handling. But it was only after this first show that I understood what he meant by that: a highly technical combination of flight and pure free ride. It opened my eyes and I realised that with the proper ability everything can be done – from simple soaring to climbing cliffs, walls and, as I had just witnessed, even dancing across the waves from jagged rock to jagged rock.

