

## **Aerial acrobatics with Mayor Mel Lastman**

When people tell me that I ride my motorcycle too fast and that nobody in the right state of mind would ever want to ride with me, I always knew that one day people would even pay for that privilege. As a matter of fact, I knew that they would even go for another ride. When that happened, I realized that everything is possible, when you believe in yourself and your abilities. I had one of the most powerful politicians in Canada, The Mayor of the City of Toronto, Mr. Mel Lastman on the back of my sport's motorcycle.

One day I got a call from John Tracogna, the organizer of the Mayoral Charity Golf Tournament, regarding the 11th Anniversary of this special event with the support from Toronto Special Events and the Office of the Mayor in City Hall. I knew John from previous events including the 8th and 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this charitable golf tournament. His previous requests were to rappel on a rope under a flying helicopter as a stunt-double for the Mayor, hely-rappel again for the next event dressed up in a Spiderman costume, and set up a world record for a new category in rappelling from a helicopter for "The Guinness Book of World Records". The Spiderman outfit was supposed to be purchased from Sony Pictures and licensed for Special Events by Marvel Enterprises Inc., as recognition for my contribution to the world of rescue. When we started talking, I knew that this was going to be "an offer I could not resist."

"So, Ivan, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind to rappelling down under the helicopter again, but this time to do it with your motorcycle and pick up the Mayor on your back seat for the Mayoral Charity Golf Tournament grand entrance. You know, business as you usual." said John.

"OK, the first part is easy. There is some potential for me to survive, but the second part troubles me." – I replied. I knew that it was the last Mayoral term for Mel Lastman, but I wondered why he would want to jeopardize his own life and go for a ride with me.

I have to mention that I admire Mel Lastman for his courage and willingness to take risks. When John Tracogna first approached me with the proposal to rappel with the Mayor for a world record sanctioned by "The Guinness Book of World Records" officials, I invited him to my home and discuss in detail the logistics and different scenarios for this aerial acrobatic element. Honestly, I just wanted to scare the hell out of him and see if he was still interested in this idea. I had to admit, that John was persistent. At the end of our meeting he said: "Now, there is something important: You have to convince the Mayor to do it..."

That was not a problem. We met with Mayor Mel at City Hall in Toronto, and by the end of our meeting he was interested to do it. I did not vote for the man, but I felt that I was going to die for him. I always admire people who know how to take reasonable risks and show leadership by example. In the end, it was not the Mayor, but the pilot who did not feel confident with this idea and declined the offer.

Now, there was a chance to work with Mayor Mel again and prove my theory, that even VIPs would be hiring me to ride on the back of my bike as part of a special event for a great cause. This public appearance was as a special guest for three charities the Sick Kids Hospital, Mount Sinai, and Centenary Heal Centre Foundation. The event was scheduled for September 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002. It took place at The Lionhead Golf and Country Club in Brampton, Ontario and was shown on TV to millions of viewers across North America. As a founder of my rescue team I was chosen to demonstrate my aerial rope access rescue operations.

The first thing that I did after I heard the details of the proposal was to call the pilot of the helicopter and discuss the logistics for descending from the helicopter with a motorcycle. It was definitely dangerous, especially because nobody had done it before. An additional concern was how I would handle the rotation of the motorcycle due to the centrifugal forces from the blades of the rotors. I could imagine spinning around in the air with a motorcycle, landing on the ground and scraping the grass around. It is similar to being thrown in a huge laundry machine. I was so happy just to imagine these things. But again, the pilot thought it was too dangerous.

After a few negotiations with all parties involved, we ended up with the following strategy: I would stand behind the hill of the golf course, the helicopter would hover above me, I would attach myself under it and fly over The Lionhead Golf and Country Club and hover above my motorcycle, which would be parked on top of a hill near the audience of spectators. Then I would rappel down precisely on top of the bike, release the rope, go down the hill, pick up the Mayor, and bring him safely to the entrance of the golf course. This would be a unique showcase for a typical scenario for emergency response and rapid deployment of rescue personnel in inaccessible areas. My goal was to do it with in 3 minutes and demonstrate to the public new advanced techniques for vertical and High-Angle operations.

There was nothing to prepare for this demo, nothing new to train for, but I did have the temptation to go for a test-ride on the freshly groomed grass and sign off with the traces of my bike tires.

Finally, the day of the event arrived. There was a lot of excitement in the air, and I was too hyper as if I were going for the Gold Medal in the Olympics. I drank a lot of water, just to cool me down. I was more concerned about setting up my camera equipment and the self timer for the photo camera than the technical demo. Now I was ready. The pilot started the engine of the helicopter, and my heart started pumping as I felt the vibrations of the blades. I felt reborn. The smell of gas, dynamics of the vibrations and lifting off the ground, made me feel that I was living my life to the fullest.

When we arrived a 100 feet above the hill and the destination of my landing, while I was upside down, I saw a beautiful sight: my motorcycle waiting for me like a loyal dog greeting his master. When I landed precisely on top of the bike, revved it up for the sound effect, and picked up the Mayor with the greetings, "Good morning Mr. Lastman, would you like to go for a ride? Welcome on board", I realized that finally, I just proved to myself that everything is possible.