

Adventure Talks: Squash Falconer

THRILL-SEEKING SQUASH FALCONER PUTS HER INCREDIBLE PHYSICAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF CLIMBING MOUNT EVEREST AND PARAGLIDING FROM THE SUMMIT OF CHAMONIX DOWN TO HER BOUNDLESS ENERGY, STRENGTH AND A GOOD DOSE OF POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE.



Squash wears the Triumph jacket. Discover the Triumph and more adventure-ready leather jackets from the Belstaff outerwear collection.

SHOP THE TRIUMPH

SHOP LEATHER JACKETS

Ten minutes into Squash Falconer’s talk at the South Kensington Club and the audience are on their feet. Everyone in the room has been instructed to stand with one foot in front of the other, eyes closed, with a hand covering the mouth to obstruct breathing. The effect is instantly uncomfortable and surprisingly disorientating. It’s designed to give a tiny glimpse into the life of a mountaineer, albeit without the altitude sickness, exhaustion, freezing conditions and the equivalent to a third of your body weight strapped to your back. It’s not exactly pleasant.

But if there was anyone destined for such a life, it’s Squash Falconer. The British adventurer and presenter (real name Louise - her unusual moniker is derived from a childhood nickname) has the boundless energy and enthusiasm of a Labrador puppy, with the sunny demeanour to match. Her insatiable appetite for new challenges and inability to say no to any and every opportunity has made her one of Britain’s foremost female adventurers and charity fundraisers. She has a knack for combining her high-octane hobbies, which also include cycling, paragliding and skiing, in unique and challenging adventures.

‘I think I’m a really lucky person because, when I wake up in the morning, I’m always in a good mood,’ she smiles. Falconer is enthusiastic when she talks about facing each task with a positive attitude. ‘Physical preparation is huge, obviously, but mental preparation is equally, if not more important. When things get really tough, you have to draw on that inner strength to keep you going.’

As an accomplished mountaineer, Falconer has had this inner strength tested to its very limits. In 2011, she reached the summit of the notoriously perilous Mount Everest, the world’s highest mountain above sea level. Though she acknowledges that standing on top of the world was ‘an incredible feeling’, she is refreshingly frank about the experience as a whole: ‘It was absolutely horrendous!’ she laughs. ‘I went through every single emotion during that expedition - it was terrible and awful and traumatic, but it was also wonderful. When I actually summited, the visibility was terrible, it was so cold and I’d pushed so hard to get to the top that I stood there and thought, “My God, have I pushed this too far?” I remember feeling incredibly anxious to get going on the journey back down.’

Falconer describes her motivation to undertake difficult, often dangerous, challenges as something ‘inbuilt’ and a part of her personality. Certainly, her rural upbringing also played a pivotal role. Growing up on the family farm in Derbyshire, she was a ‘mini adventurer’ from the outset, with a playground of trees, barns, tractors and quad-bikes. A self-confessed tomboy, her passion for outdoor pursuits has always run in parallel with her love of speed. She was taught to drive by her uncle at the age of six and her early access to quads and trikes developed into an enduring love of motorcycles.

Recently, Falconer has completed filming an adventure series that involved some very precarious riding through South America, and she hopes to do a second series in Africa. ‘There’s something so amazing about the freedom of being on a motorbike,’ she enthuses. ‘Riding at speed and being so close to the elements is absolutely incredible - I’m addicted to the thrill of it.’

It was gaining her motorcycle licence that prompted her to embark on one of her greatest accomplishments to date. In 2009, she came up with the idea to ride through France to the base of Mont Blanc, in Chamonix. From there, she planned to climb to the top and paraglide back down. With no money to fund her ambitious itinerary, Falconer pitched the idea to both the BBC and BMW Motorcycles for sponsorship, telling each that the other was completely on board. The go-ahead from both came through in the nick of time - and there was no turning back. She and veteran paraglider 65-year-old Irwyn Jehu, who had summited Mont Blanc some 40 years previously, set off together. With great gusto from both parties and good fortune on their side, the voyage was a success, and the footage ended up being used as a segment on the BBC television show Inside Out. Falconer’s hair-raising, 22-minute paraglide descent also earned her an FAI Royal Aero Club recognised world record for being the first British woman to accomplish such a feat.

As a woman in what is often perceived to be a man’s world, Falconer is often hailed as a role model. ‘I like to make a difference - to both men and women,’ she says, modestly. ‘If I can change someone’s perception and help them go for their dreams, that’s a fantastic thing.’

‘I always say, if you want to do something, it’s out there - just find the right people to help you through it. The most important thing is to just go for it.’

Squash Falconer spoke on behalf of Belstaff’s Adventure Talks series at the South Kensington Club.

southkensingtonclub.com

squashfalconer.com