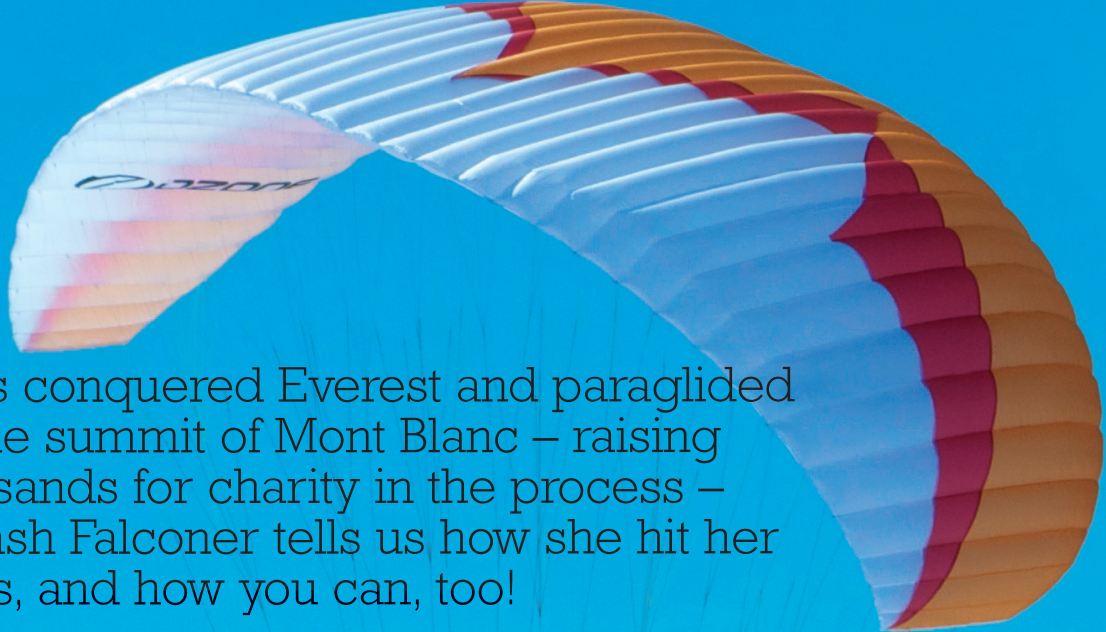


fit kit



She's conquered Everest and paraglided off the summit of Mont Blanc – raising thousands for charity in the process – Squash Falconer tells us how she hit her goals, and how you can, too!

“I CAN do it”



© Phil Turner

“Everest was never a childhood dream, or something I thought was an option until quite recently. My love for mountains started when I did a ski season in France at 18, but I never thought seriously about climbing one. A

couple of years later, I took part in an adventure event, the Saab-Salomon 36-hour X-Adventure Race, which involved a mixture of cycling, canoeing, running, abseiling and all sorts. I was part of the first all-girls team – the four of us called ourselves the Lipstick Blondes. Before then, I'd never run further than 12 miles. The last eight hours of that event was a 30-mile fell run, I couldn't believe I'd done it! You can get your body to extraordinary points you never thought possible. My team won a prize for capturing the spirit of adventure racing.

“After that, some of the girls were going off to climb Aconcagua, a 7,000m peak in Argentina, and I thought: ‘I want to do that, too!’ My friends were experienced enough to help me technically, and they knew I'd be capable,

fitness-wise, because of the adventure race. So, I did it!

higher heights

“A few months later, we decided to climb Mustagata in China, take our skis and snowboards, and film it. Sadly, we got to within a few hundred feet of the summit, and had to turn back because of adverse weather conditions. But, our short film about it, *I Can Do That*, did really well, winning Best of the Fest at the Kendal Mountain Festival!

“In 2008, two of us Lipstick Blondes decided to go for Cho Oyu in Nepal, which, at only 600m

below Everest, is seriously big! I took my bum board this time as I found my snowboard heavy to carry up Mustagata, and my friend Suzy took her skis. We summated, then Suzy skied down and I did some of it on my bum board – she became the first woman to ski an 8,000m peak and I became the world's highest bum boarder! We decided early on that walking down mountains was definitely over-rated, so we'd get down by any other method!

“In 2009, I had an idea to ride a motorbike to France, climb Mont Blanc and paraglide off the top. I'd passed my motorbike test in 2006 and always dreamed of biking to the south of France, and learned to paraglide at around the same time, so I rolled three dreams into one. At first it was a bit of a joke, but I did it. Afterwards that I found out that I was the first



© Oliver Cruncheflake

British female to have climbed and successfully flown a paraglider from the summit!

to the top

"It wasn't until someone told me that I'd be strong enough to climb Everest that the seed was planted in my brain, and I thought, 'Maybe...'. So, last November, I took myself to Nepal for a month to do some intense training on my paraglider. In December I announced my plans to the world. Of course, no-one thought I could do it because it meant starting in three month's time. But, I based myself in the Alps, and from January to March I trained really hard and got the sponsorship together.

"The best way to train is to replicate your sport. I hiked up ski slopes with a heavy pack on my back – carrying 15kg worth of garden-sized Jenga bricks in my bag. I was able to get to altitudes of up to 3,500m climbing up the Grande Motte glacier in Tignes. To further boost my fitness, I also cycled and ran. I was training hard every other day for 2-6 hours.

"I made sure I had a healthy diet, but I ate tons: cheese, pain au chocolat, steak! I don't usually like meat, but when I'm training or on an expedition I eat it because my body craves the protein. It's really important to listen to your body when you're training, because we all need different things. I tried to put weight on, but even though I was eating practically everything in sight, I just couldn't do it because I was exercising so hard.

"I packed loads of chocolate bars for the expedition. My kit also included 60 pairs of knickers, a pair for every day of the trip. I have a knickers philosophy: 'If your knickers are right, everything else goes right!' As much as it's a joke, if you're comfortable in what you're wearing, you'll perform better. One of the first things I say to people who are trying to get into fitness is to buy yourself a cool outfit – feel comfortable in the clothes you're in because it has a massive effect on what you're doing.

"I HAVE A KNICKERS PHILOSOPHY: IF YOUR KNICKERS ARE RIGHT, EVERYTHING ELSE GOES RIGHT! AS MUCH AS IT'S A JOKE, IF YOU'RE COMFORTABLE, YOU'LL PERFORM BETTER"

"My Everest expedition started at the end of March. Apart from rest days, we were climbing for 5-8 hours. The lack of oxygen feels bizarre; everything slows down. Your resting heart rate is about 150-160, because there's such little oxygen in your blood. You feel so tired, just to get up and get dressed makes you out of breath. Imagine you're on a treadmill set to the maximum incline, put a plastic bag on your head so you can't breathe properly, then carry a heavy pack, and you're starting to get the idea!

"On 12th May 2011, I reached the summit of Everest – it was horrific! The weather was terrible (-50C, 60kph winds, poor visibility) and I was more exhausted than I've ever been in my life. Reaching the top of a mountain is only getting halfway there. On the way up you have to keep asking yourself: 'Have I got enough energy to get back down?' Not far from the top I wasn't sure if I could go on. But, judging by the weather at the time I decided I could continue. Yet, the weather got worse. By the time I reached the top, I really didn't know if I could get back down.

"Obviously, paragliding off was never going to happen in those conditions. But, the pressure was still on, because when I got down to high camp, the weather had improved and I wondered if it was possible to fly from the south col, which at 8,000m, would still be a record. I tried to take off, but couldn't, so I still had to get down after this incredibly tough summit push feeling exhausted. It was only when I got back down to base camp and had that first shower, and started eating properly again that I thought, 'Wow, I've made it'. Looking back, it feels amazing to have achieved such an incredible thing."

Squash on...

■ **MOTIVATION:** "I think the buzz you get from doing sport – whether it's a 20-minute run or a big, endurance challenge – is the same. It makes you feel fantastic. When I did my first adventure race, I thought, 'If I can do that, I can do other things'. A lot of people are told the reasons why they shouldn't do something, but I've always been instilled with the confidence to go for things."

■ **LAZY DAYS:** "Like everyone else, I have days and weeks where I'm not motivated, I'm eating badly and not doing enough exercise, but I think that's normal. If I go off the rails a bit I don't punish myself for it, I just get back on it. When I get back from a big expedition I have a few weeks where I don't do a lot, I eat what I want and do what I want. Sometimes, you really just need a break."

■ **ENDURANCE:** "You have to dig deep inside your mind. I always say to people that you climb physically and mentally – on Everest, I climbed emotionally, too! I was mentally exhausted on summit day and I just didn't know how I was going to carry on and that's when the emotional side kicked in. I powered on because if I didn't, I was dead. Thinking about all my friends and family kept me going."

■ **INSPIRATION:** "Growing up, I was never an exceptional sportswoman; I'm just somebody who's fairly fit, worked hard at it, got to know my own body, and has believed in myself. I hope people don't look at me and think: 'I could never do that,' I want them to think, 'If she can do it, I can do it!' I really hope I inspire people to be positive about whatever it is they want to do."

Squash is sponsored by Salomon and Suunto and she'll be using the new Suunto Quest wristwatch training device for her challenges this season. To find out what Squash is up to next or donate to the charities she supports, visit squashfalconer.com