



HIS THRILLS, YOUR SLEEPLESS NIGHTS?

Dating an adrenaline junkie can be exciting initially but living with his death wish could kill your relationship. It's time to take control. By Carla Calitz

Watching your man throw himself out of a plane, race around a track at 260km/h on his motorbike or balance precariously off a rock face is probably not how you – or most women – envisage spending every weekend. Not only does his pursuit of a dangerous sport eat into your precious downtime together but you also have to live with the constant fear that your man may break a limb or his neck – or both! You need to decide whether you can live with his death wish or whether it's likely to kill you.

FATAL ATTRACTION

Four years ago, shortly after Faith Thomas, 39, COSMO's sales and advertising manager in Johannesburg, met her boyfriend, Gary Webster, he was introduced to high-altitude mountaineering. 'Gary was hooked straight away,' she says. 'This year he spent six weeks scaling summits in Ecuador. For those six weeks I lived in constant fear that he was going to die. I couldn't sleep properly because

I kept waiting for the phone to ring. Every morning I'd have to get up and go to work but it was so difficult to concentrate – I couldn't stop wondering whether he'd fallen and injured himself or, worse, died. You start thinking about what you'll do when he dies, what you'll tell his family and friends, and what will happen at his funeral. Every time I say goodbye to him at the airport I never know whether it's the last time I'm going to see him.

'The only way I can control my fear is by training with him to make sure he's prepared. We argue a lot when I feel he hasn't trained enough and isn't taking his next challenge seriously enough. We also argue when he says he wants to tackle every single peak during his next expedition. It freaks me out that although he tells me how scared he gets, it doesn't stop him doing it. He's a strong man and he will keep on pushing past the limits, and that's what kills people – when their heads push them past the reality of the situation.

'Increasingly, I'm becoming resentful too because his trips are very expensive. And his ultimate goal is Everest but that is where I'll draw the line – I can't deal with that. But as much as his sport freaks me out, I'm still incredibly proud of him and love his determined, brave streak. What he's managed to do is a massive achievement and people respect what he's accomplished. I just wish he would do something else that wasn't that dangerous.'

It seems that men are generally more drawn to dangerous, risky pursuits than women. 'Men are natural-born competitors – ambitious, status-conscious, risk-taking, single-minded,' wrote Dr Helena Cronin, author and co-director of the Darwin Centre at the Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science at the London School of Economics, in the *Cape Times* of 29 August 2008. 'Men take risks even when it's a bad idea; women don't take them at all.'

Women are definitely attracted to men who have a sense of adventure – initially, anyway, says Thuraisha

Moodley, a Johannesburg clinical psychologist. 'Their thrilling pursuits become exhilarating for the women involved with them.'

But unfortunately the very thing that you love about him is exactly what could compromise you and end your relationship. The initial excitement of dating an action man can quickly be overshadowed by your fear and anxiety. 'As commitment grows in a relationship, you expect that your needs will be valued too, but when your partner continues to choose his extreme activity over your needs, you may start feeling as though you're second best and even feel rejected,' Moodley says. 'Then you'll probably start resenting his activity and, eventually, him.'

So how do you cope with this fear without losing sight of your own needs? Should you learn to embrace it or must you walk away from the relationship?

FACING YOUR FEARS

Although it's important to respect your man's wants and needs, this shouldn't be done at the expense of your own, cautions Moodley. 'If you feel you're constantly second-guessing your feelings in the relationship and constantly talking yourself into being okay with his extreme activities, there's a problem. If you deny your own "voice", you're disregarding yourself.'

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Before you make any decisions and confront your man, first research his new sport and try to gather information so that you know your facts, says Dr Tanya Robinson, a Johannesburg family therapist. 'In most of these adrenaline activities there are a lot of safety measures that have been implemented that make them much safer. Learning what they are will help reduce your stress,' she says.

If you'd like to take it a step further and try out his new hobby yourself, then keep in mind there are the right reasons and the wrong reasons to do this. 'If you're doing it genuinely to understand and engage with him, then you're on the right track,' Moodley says. 'But if you develop negative feelings such as anxiety and still continue to engage in the sport, you're not respecting yourself. You'll eventually end up blaming him.'

When you know exactly how dangerous his extreme sport is and what the risks are, sort out where you stand in your own head by being brutally honest with yourself.

'Examine the issue rationally by moving away from your fear and anxiety,' says Moodley. 'Think about what attracted you to your man in the first place and whether you still find that attractive. Ask yourself the hard questions: what are your fears? Can you overcome them? What are your long-term hopes for the relationship and do these fit in with his dangerous sport? If you are willing to stay, what are you willing to put up with and what aren't you? And are you willing to stick around if something goes wrong?'

You may be willing to compromise on some of your needs but you have to figure out which of your needs are non-negotiable – these are the ones that determine your happiness. 'You may rationalise that you don't really have to have a certain need fulfilled, but subconsciously you may still require it to make you happy,' says Moodley. 'For example, you may say to yourself that you're so lucky to have such an exciting partner who isn't a "run-of-the-mill guy", but you may be innately craving that guy who prefers to sit on the couch and watch movies with you on a Sunday afternoon rather than jump out of a plane.'

The solution is to delve deep. 'Know what is important to you and embrace it,' says Moodley. 'Don't be scared of being alone. Settling for only a part of what you need in a relationship will make you unhappy and resentful towards your man for not meeting your expectations, and towards yourself ▶

RELATIONSHIPS

for staying in the relationship. Evaluate whether you're choosing the relationship for *your* right reasons. If they're not your right reasons, you can choose to walk away.'

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Being honest with your man regarding your fears and concerns is essential, says Moodley. 'Be gentle when you let him know you can't compromise on what you feel and explain to him why. He may not like what you say but you have every right to be heard, as long as you listen to his side too. But know that his sport may be a large part of what affirms his sense of being and defines him.'

If you're prepared to take the risk of asking him to stop his sport, you must be prepared to lose him. 'Be careful of forcing him to stop by giving him harsh ultimatums, because he may resent and blame you in the future,' warns Moodley. Consider too that he may stop pursuing his sport for you but, because you've taken his sense of autonomy and who he is away from him, he may end up not being the man you fell in love with in the first place.

If you're always going to feel uneasy, distrustful and resentful, you have to consider whether this relationship is the right fit for you, Moodley says. 'Never

disregard your feelings. They'll build up and eventually contribute to the breakdown of the relationship anyway.'

A SAFETY NET

Ultimately, if you decide to stay in this relationship you need to come to terms with your partner's activities and accept that this is a big part of who he is, says Robinson. 'You need to realise that you're not going to change him, no matter how strongly or optimistic you feel that he'll change for you. Know that you'll have to be willing to compromise and accommodate this danger within your relationship,' she says.

During open discussions you can try, together, to set some boundaries on his activities. 'For example, you can tell him you're okay with his skydiving but you'd feel very uncomfortable if he tried base jumping,' she says.

Tania de Matos, 23, a Johannesburg accountant, wasn't impressed when her boyfriend, Devon Pearman, announced that he was taking up superbiking. 'I've tried to be supportive but I have serious reservations surrounding his safety so we discussed what I'm willing to compromise on and what I'm not. Our agreement is that he can ride on the track but he won't ever use his bike to commute to work and he won't ever ride alone. I made sure he got all the

necessary safety kit, including a spine protector and leathers. I also read some of his biking magazines to stay informed and I try to keep him as safety-conscious as possible. When he goes to the track, he always rides in a group and when he gets there he sends me an SMS to tell me he got there safely.'

If you're planning to have children with him, you will need to consider how his pursuits may impact on them, says Moodley. 'You have to ascertain whether you are okay with this kind of life for your children. They might feel anxious about his pursuits, especially if he has an accident, or they might become used to his extreme lifestyle because they'll grow up with it,' she says.

If there are children involved already or you're financially dependent on him, it's a good idea to take out life insurance for him, advises Robinson. 'Or you could open a bank account and put away money every month – it's a reasonable compromise,' she says. Just don't use this as a tactic to lay a guilt trip on him.

But when his activity becomes an obsession and he frequently pushes the danger to new and higher levels, it's time to walk away. As Robinson says, 'When he has no respect for the boundaries that were agreed upon by you as a couple, it's advisable to reconsider and re-evaluate your relationship.' □

THE ULTIMATE DEATH WISHES



Wingsuit base jumping

WINGSUIT BASE JUMPING

Traditional base jumping (junkies launching themselves from fixed objects such as buildings, antennas and mountains with an unopened parachute that opens split seconds before they hit the ground) is freaky enough. Wingsuit base jumping sees these crazies 'flying' as close as possible to mountain faces and buildings in a jump suit fitted with inflatable fabric 'wings'. Parachutes cushion their landing but errors in judgment do lead to serious injuries and fatalities.



Speed flying

SPEED FLYING Combining extreme paragliding with skiing, riders use paragliding canopies half the size of normal ones to hurtle down mountains at speeds of more than 120km/h, dodging obstacles such as skiers, rocks and cliffs.



Canopy piloting

CANOPY PILOTING

These skydivers jump out of a plane, open their parachutes, swoop within centimetres of the ground while dodging obstacles and drag their feet through a body of water at speeds of up to 150km/h, with minimal protective gear.



Freestyle motocross

FREESTYLE MOTOCROSS (FMX)

Unlike traditional motocross, FMX places less emphasis on high speeds and more on the abilities of daredevil riders to perform thrilling stunts high up in the air. Riders often scale heights of more than 15m but whether they make it down in one piece is what keeps the audience gagging for more.