

**METRO** & **Jeep** PRESENT

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DISCOVER EXPERIENCES THAT DEFY CONVENTION

# FLIP OUT

**Nitro Circus** is the hair-raising BMX team that's coming to the UK. *Katie Amey* finds out how they pull it off

**W**ATCHING Nitro Circus live is a white-knuckle ride in itself. Witnessing the death-defying tricks and jumps; dips and stunts, the audience is left with hearts firmly in stomachs, wondering if the performers in this travelling spectacle are about to go one BMX backflip too far. Fortunately, these adrenaline-seeking daredevils have been perfecting their exhilarating routines for long enough that we're probably in safe hands. It all began back in 2000, when 32-year-old Travis Pastrana – the ringleader of Nitro Circus, both literally and figuratively – began inviting like-minded individuals over to his house to practice high-end dirt bike tricks.

"We just started filming it and we had a lot of crashes," he laughs. "Eventually, we just got this following through the industry and it got us an MTV show."

He's referring to the long-running televised mini-series, popular especially in the United States and Australia, which featured Pastrana and his band of FMX-riding followers, trying their hand at just about any seemingly impossible biking manoeuvre. Specifically, cameras pitted Pastrana, an accomplished X Games gold medalist, against his Big Wheel tricycle rival, Andy Bell, as they went on tour down under. "We really wanted to travel and see new places," Pastrana says. "The TV show allowed us to do that, but we wondered if we were to do this in stadiums, could we make it work? We didn't think anything would come of it, but the crowds were on their feet standing."

Since then, the 'cluster of a show' theme has been one that the collective has stuck with – attempting bigger and better feats (and crashes) at every venue. "We're coming [to the UK] with new ramps, new tricks... with a similar show format," he explains. "Our job is to entertain the crowd and inspire them to take some risks. But, for us, the new ramps allow us to push bigger, go higher and, hopefully, not get hurt quite as often."

Noteworthy among Nitro Circus's equipment is the infamous Giganta Ramp, which was missing from the collective's most recent Moto Mayhem Tour. The 50-foot ramp is normally used by skateboarders and BMX riders, but has also in the

past been tackled by Aaron "Wheelz" Fotheringham – in his wheelchair.

Nitro Circus is also the only place in the world that audiences can see a triple backflip performed on a BMX bike, though such an impressive feat is rarely accomplished without a high-level of risk involved. "There are two guys in the world who have ever done it on BMX," Pastrana smiles. "And they're both on the tour. So, whoever draws the shortest string... James Foster actually broke his ribs three times on that trick last year. He's now invested in a much better rib plate." Pastrana assures me

that it's a 'really cool trick,' despite its potential for broken bones.

Though there's no guarantee that Foster will land his triple flip on any given night, it's precisely the tour's spontaneous nature that crowds will gravitate towards. "What was the biggest trick last year? Honestly, it was in a warm-up," Pastrana says. "The ramps keep changing and they allow people to do new things. With the ramps that are used in X Games, the more traditional ramps, these tricks wouldn't even be within the realms of possibility."

The Nitro Circus team is back in the UK early next year and if you're lucky enough to get tickets, keep your eyes open for a 1080-degree front flip, which Pastrana and his crew are currently in the process of perfecting. The BMX rider will complete three full spins and one front flip all in the same jump – before hoping and praying that he sticks the landing. But there's a good chance that what will become the most impressive stunt on next year's tour probably hasn't even been invented yet.

"When you come, you will see the best in the world doing stuff that they have probably never landed before," he says. "We have more fun than anyone else is willing to do and people live vicariously through the show."

Even vicariously, it's a pretty crazy ride to be on.



**'JAMES FOSTER ACTUALLY BROKE HIS RIBS THREE TIMES ON THAT TRICK LAST YEAR. HE'S NOW INVESTED IN A MUCH BETTER RIB PLATE'**



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To see full tour details, visit [nitrocircus.com/tour](http://nitrocircus.com/tour)

# ROCK THE BOAT

*Ellie Ross* tries **Zapcat racing** and gets more than she's bargained for



Hitting the waves: Ellie tries out Zapcat racing  
PICTURE: FELICITY MILLWARD

**I**T'S ONLY when I spot the full-face helmet that I realise I am about to embark on something pretty extreme.

As I lie in the bow of the boat, my bright orange headgear glints in the sun, causing my body to brace itself.

I hadn't thought riding in a Zapcat would be so hardcore; I guess I simply imagined it to be a fun, but tame, powerboat ride.

But Rowan Kewley, owner of UK Powerboat Charter, is quick to correct me when I arrive at the harbour in Christchurch, Dorset, for a two-hour Zapcat experience.

"Zapcats can reach 50mph, pull 3Gs in a quarter of a second and have the same power-to-weight ratio as a Ferrari," he says with a smile. "Don't underestimate them."

Zapcats are four-metre inflatable catamarans, decked out with powerful engines, plus a couple of foot straps and ropes so you can hang on for dear life.

Built for speed, they are light and insanely agile, turning on a sixpence and leaping clean into the air at the pilot's control.

They originated in South Africa, where they were used for surf rescue – but racing them in two-man teams has since become popular with extreme sport fans and I've come for a taster session.

The format is simple: my group of six will be taken out to sea in a regular powerboat by Rowan, where we'll each have a go razzing around in the Zapcat with a pilot.

Although the majority of clients are men, Rowan promises that this experience is for thrill-seekers of either gender.

Once in the open sea, Rowan cranks up the speed until we're coasting through the waves, wind in our hair and salt water spraying our faces. I yelp – but this was only the warm-up.

Yanking on that bright orange helmet, I swap my light lifejacket for a more padded variety, then throw myself from the powerboat into the Zapcat.



**WE'RE HIT BY A WAVE AND LAUNCHED TO WHAT FEELS LIKE A STRATOSPHERIC HEIGHT**

My heart thumps in my chest as I clamber to the front of the boat, jam my feet into the straps and grip the rope.

Luckily I'm in good hands, because my pilot, Will Evans, is three-time national Zapcat champion.

"If you want to stop, just tap the side of the boat," he advises, hand on throttle. His black helmet and tinted goggles make him look like a cross between The Stig and Darth Vader.

"Ready?" he asks. Wedging my feet further into the straps, I force myself to nod – then the engine roars and we shoot off, bumping along the water at a ridiculously fast pace.

We career towards the shore, then turn right, left, and right again, my entire body lurching with each sharp pivot.

All of a sudden, we're hit by a wave and launched to what feels like a stratospheric height, before falling back down again, drenched.

Clamping the rope with a vice-like grip, my whole forearm aches as I desperately try not to end up in Will's lap.

Then we start chasing the powerboat, using its wake as a ramp to get some more air, even motoring along on one hull.

It's not only physically demanding, but the need to concentrate the whole time – shifting my body weight with each turn – makes it mentally challenging as well.

A couple of times I feel sure we were going to flip over, especially since Rowan has told me that this is a regular occurrence in competitive Zapcat racing. But from the back of the boat, Will keeps asking if I was OK, giving me enough of a thrill without tipping me over the edge, literally.

By the end, my nerves – and hands – are worn ragged, but I have a silly grin plastered across my face. Zapcats, it turns out, really are more extreme than you might think.

To try it for yourself, visit [zapcat-experience.co.uk](http://zapcat-experience.co.uk)