



1
00:00:00,730 --> 00:00:06,150

Hi, I'm Steve Sicheloff, a Public Affairs writer here at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

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00:00:06,150 --> 00:00:11,310

I recently had the chance to fly with STS-135 Commander Chris Ferguson, as he made one of his last

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00:00:11,310 --> 00:00:15,110

practice landings in a Shuttle Training Aircraft, what we call an STA.

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00:00:15,110 --> 00:00:20,700

It's a Gulfstream II business jet that NASA modified to fly like a space shuttle making its approach to landing.

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00:00:20,700 --> 00:00:27,630

That means it will tilt its nose down and soar toward the runway on a glide path seven times steeper than an ai

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00:00:27,630 --> 00:00:32,810

Basically, it's the ultimate rollercoaster ride, no rails attached.

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00:00:32,810 --> 00:00:39,190

The STA was waiting for us at the Shuttle Landing Facility. Fergie's made 1,400 dives at the runway in an STA

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00:00:39,190 --> 00:00:41,990

He gets inside first wearing his launch and entry suit,

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00:00:41,990 --> 00:00:45,630

affectionately called the pumpkin suit he'll wear during a real landing.

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00:00:45,630 --> 00:00:49,890

We fly to 28,000 feet above the three-mile-long Shuttle Landing Facility.

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00:00:49,890 --> 00:00:53,840

There are a few clouds higher than us, but nothing below except air and the lighted outlines of

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00:00:53,840 --> 00:00:58,340

Florida's space coast, the Vehicle Assembly Building rising majestically.

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00:00:58,340 --> 00:01:03,140

It took us nine minutes to get up here. It's only going to take a minute to get down.

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00:01:03,140 --> 00:01:07,730

The dive begins basically as soon as the instructor pilot puts the engines in reverse.

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00:01:07,730 --> 00:01:11,140

This is when you feel gravity loosen its hold, but not for long.

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00:01:11,140 --> 00:01:16,810

Fergie uses controls just like the shuttle's. He steers it along an invisible circle known as the HAC,

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00:01:16,810 --> 00:01:25,930

the heading alignment cone, then continues on a straight path to the runway.

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00:01:25,930 --> 00:01:30,520

We're riding in the passenger part of the aircraft, behind the pilots and flight engineer.

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00:01:30,520 --> 00:01:35,490

We feel ourselves slide forward and then gravity really grabs us as the plane falls.

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00:01:35,490 --> 00:01:39,920

Fergie pulls up on the stick and everything is set for landing approach.

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00:01:39,920 --> 00:01:45,120

Lights at the end of the runway pass safely beneath the STA and Fergie gets his approach.

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00:01:45,120 --> 00:01:50,930

The engines reset for normal flight and we head back up into the sky for another nine practice runs.