

From Altitude to Investment:

INTERVIEW BY ZARA JEFFERY

New Zealander Al Jeffery on Reviving Wills Wing and the Future of Hang Gliding

On July 26, 2025, Zara Jeffery sat down with her father, Al Jeffery to discuss his journey from childhood awe at flight to becoming the lead investor in pioneering hang glider manufacturer Wills Wing. Al shares how adventure, engineering, and a passion for flight have converged in his mission to revitalise the sport.

You were born and raised in New Zealand. How did growing up there shape your approach to adventure, risk, and business?

I moved to New Zealand when I was two and grew up in Dunedin on the South Island. I spent a lot of time in Queenstown and Central Otago—amazing places to grow up. I remember seeing my first hang glider at Coronet Peak in the mid-70s. A pilot, who turned out to be a colleague of my father's at Dunedin Hospital, launched from the summit, and I was captivated. That Christmas, I got a hang glider poster and it stayed on my wall throughout my teens.

Although I was fascinated by

the sport, I didn't get the chance to try it until my mid-20s when I was living in the UK. I trained with a teacher named Russ Crowley. I vividly remember my first flight—on a breezy summer day in the Home Counties, balancing the glider on my shoulders, running gently down a grassy hill, and then suddenly lifting off. I barely left the ground, but that sensation was unforgettable.

Did that early passion stay with you?

It did, though I didn't fly for many years. In the 70s and 80s, hang gliding was booming but also had a reputation for being dangerous. There were accidents—often due to poor equipment or training—which tempered my enthusiasm. But I kept following the sport.

After earning a PhD in engineering in London, I moved into banking, then founded Bluestone in Sydney. For nearly 20 years, I was focused on building that business and raising a family. Flying took a back seat.

In 2015, I found myself with more time and began training again in Spain with a school called Lejair. I bought a Wills Wing Falcon from Juaki the Spanish dealer and had my first high flights on it. I absolutely loved it. The Falcon is an amazing

glider, and that experience rekindled my passion.

What led you to invest in Wills Wing?

I'd kept an eye on the company for years. Wills Wing was founded in the 1970s by Bob and Chris Wills and their family. It was one of the pioneers of hang gliding and remains one of the last major manufacturers in a shrinking industry.

challenged, industry. That's often a great strategic position. Our mission is to make the company stronger and help the entire hang gliding community to grow.

We need to attract younger men and women to the sport. That means making gliders safer, lighter, and easier to fly and land. We're kicking off a new R&D program with a team of engineers—many of



ABOVE; THE SPORT 3 HAS BEEN A HUGE SUCCESS AND THE T3 IS NOW BACK IN PRODUCTION WITH CARBON PARTS SUPPLY SORTED

In 2021, I read they had moved operations to Mexico. I was curious. In 2023 or 2024, I mentioned this to Juaki, who introduced me to Rudy, who runs the business. A couple of weeks later, I was in Valle de Bravo with my son Will, touring the factory. It just felt like a great opportunity.

Over a few months, Rudy and I structured an investment deal. Through my family office, I became the majority shareholder, alongside Rudy, his brother, and Chris Wills. The timing was right, and I wanted to help not just revive Wills Wing, but reinvigorate the sport.

What convinced you that Wills Wing was a business worth growing?

It's a market leader in a niche, albeit

them passionate pilots—focused on innovation. Our goal is to reduce the weight of all gliders in the range by 15-20% over the next five years, along with continual refinement.

How do you balance emotional passion for flying with commercial realities?

It's a good question. Many investors get into a passion project and lose objectivity. But I come at this with a professional mindset. This is a serious investment—an important part of my family's portfolio. My goal is to marry passion and performance. It has to stand on its own as a successful business.

What excites you about the hang gliding community, and where is the sport headed?

The community is fantastic, but it's

RIGHT; AL LAUNCHING THE FALCON

ageing. Like many outdoor activities, hang gliding has struggled to compete with digital entertainment. Our focus is on outreach to younger people—especially those in their 20s to 40s.

We're developing Wills Wing-accredited schools, helping instructors build sustainable businesses, and promoting the sport through social media and university clubs. When people try hang gliding, they love it—it's just about exposure and accessibility.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for Wills Wing today?

We live in a world of 8 billion people. Many are gaining time, freedom, and income to try new experiences. With Wills Wing based in Mexico, we're well positioned—close to the U.S., and within reach of South America and growing markets in Asia Pacific.

Rudy and I have already spent weeks on the road visiting dealers, suppliers, and instructors. We're listening and learning. We want to make sure that as we grow, we're building what the community actually needs.

Do you see parallels between Wills Wing and your past ventures?

Absolutely. I've scaled businesses fast before—Bluestone was the fastest growing company in Australia



BELOW; HANG GLIDER PILOTS KNOW HOW GOOD IT FEELS



at one point. I see Wills Wing evolving beyond hang gliders into related wind sports. Anything that involves wings and the wind is fair game.

We'll be leveraging Wills Wing's brand, legacy, and Rudy's amazing team in Mexico, plus our global network of dealers and engineers, to build something lasting.

Finally, how does it feel to be part of a community that quite literally lives to fly?

I love it. That first sensation—your feet lifting off the ground—it sticks with you for life. Only pilots know what that feels like. Hang gliding is unique. It's a blend of simplicity and freedom, with a sense of control that's hard to match.

We're doing rigorous testing with institutions like DHV in Germany, pushing gliders to their limits. I'm enjoying every part of this: the community, the challenge, the engineering—and I'm looking forward to the next ten years of flight.



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