

THE THRILLIONAIRE



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A PRODUCER from *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* rang Nik Halik from London recently to talk about a television shoot with the Hawthorn man.

He wanted to establish what luxury possessions they could film, and began by asking what kinds of exotic cars Halik had in his garage.

Halik stalled.

"Let me guess: Maserati?" the producer hinted. "Not quite," Halik replied.

"OK, Ferrari?" Nope.

"So... you like action. You're a James Bond kind of guy. I bet you've got an Aston Martin locked away."

"I do like Aston Martin," Halik said. "But, actually I don't own a car."

The producer quickly assumed Halik preferred boats, imagining he would have a cruiser the size of Greg Norman's.

He was dumbfounded when Halik explained that he doesn't own a boat, a plane, or even a valuable painting.

Halik gets around in T-shirt and jeans, rarely wears a suit, and could never be accused of opulence.

If he wants to go anywhere, he gets a lift — or he walks.

He doesn't own a car, a boat or works of art because he doesn't invest in anything that moves or can be moved.

That's one of the philosophies the former guitar player in Melbourne band *Big Deal* has used to make money as an investor and creator of wealth prospectus conferences.

Halik owns property — in Australia, the Greek islands and Morocco — but his only indulgence is adventure. He is a "thrillionaire".

In the past few years he has travelled to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean to the wreck of the *Titanic*, flown into space in a Russian MiG-25 jet, run with the bulls in Pamplona, lived with Bedouins, chased tornadoes across America's Midwest and climbed the highest peaks of four of the world's seven continents.

The Nik Halik story reads like one of the adventure yarns he pored over when he was a sickly boy, growing up in Airport West.

He was an asthmatic who was afraid to go outside because he was embarrassed by his bifocal glasses.

He buried himself in the atlas and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and in the tales of his hero, the Belgian storybook adventurer Tintin.

For 12 years after permanently deferring university, he played guitar in bands by night and he invested in property and the stock market by day.

Now 38, he has never had a nine-to-five job.

He does not come from a rich family — his late father was a truck driver and his mother was a machinist — but he has grown wealthy through investing, and through his financial businesses.

He runs financial "events" around the world. This year alone, he has held conferences in Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, New York and London, with more scheduled for South Africa and the Netherlands. Halik spends roughly eight months of each year working, and four months going to



Man on a mission: adventurer Nik Halek kits up for a MiG-25 flight into space (top), waves gleefully from the Andes peak Mt Aconcagua, and looks the part in *Big Deal*.

some of the world's most remote locations to live his dreams.

He first drew up his hit list of adventures, including the *Titanic*, travelling to space and climbing Mt Everest, when he was 11.

No challenge has been too daunting or too far away.

Fortunately, his curiosity for seeking the most epic odysseys is matched by his preparedness to take risks and his capacity to pay.

When he first took off from Melbourne after 10 years as a guitarist, having appeared on shows such as Channel 9's *Hey Hey It's Saturday*, he went to Pamplona, Spain, to run with the bulls, and then joined a Bedouin tribe in the Sahara desert.

Six years ago he went to the Yuri Gagarin cosmonaut training centre, 40km northeast of Moscow, and enrolled for cosmonaut training.

The fee he paid would have bought a nice house — but the cost for him was worth every cent.

After months of training, including zero gravity flight, he went to the edge of space in a MiG-25, the world's highest altitude aircraft.

"We passed through the sound barrier three times, doing six or seven Gs," he says. "The more crazy stuff I do, the more I want."

HE was at a Melbourne cinema watching the movie *Titanic* when — at the moment the liner started sinking — the theatre's sprinkler system activated, drenching the audience.

Halik returned another day to see the film through and noticed on the closing credits that footage of the wreck had been achieved by submersibles launched from a scientific research mother ship named *Academic Keldysh*.

He made inquiries, found the ship at the Shirshov Academy of Sciences in Kaliningrad, and became one of a handful of people who have travelled down to the *Titanic*, at the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean.

He even ate lunch in a three-man submersible on the foredeck of *Titanic*, 5km below the surface.

Six months ago he climbed to the summit of Mt Aconcagua in the Andes, the highest peak of South America, and he has three more mountains to climb in his mission to complete the seven peaks quest. He has aimed for Mt Everest for May next year.

He already has another adventure planned for next May — he's going back to experience the tornado season in America's Midwest states of Kansas, Nebraska and the Texas Panhandle. He recently returned from storm-chasing across "tornado alley", which he did with a meteorologist, driving more than 400km each day.

He intends to return to "tornado alley" next May — but, in the meantime, he has joined forces with another obsessive adventurer, Gisborne's Peter Bland, for a foray into Antarctica.

Bland's previous trips to the frozen continent have been dramatic — he almost died in 2001 after falling down a crevasse.

Bland became the first Australian to walk 650km to the North (magnetic) Pole, just 12 months after his second major heart operation.

Bland and Halik have teamed up to charter a Russian ice-breaker, which this summer will take passengers from Patagonia for an 11-day adventure to Antarctica.

The concept, called Cash Flow on

Ice, will integrate the voyage with financial seminars conducted by Halik and tales of epic expeditions presented by Bland. They have chartered a 70m ice-breaker to take voyages to the Antarctic Peninsula between next December and April (www.AdventureOdyssey.com.au).

Halik's passion for adventure sees no boundaries. His ultimate ambition is to go to the moon.

FOR anyone else, that dream would sound fanciful — but this "thrillionaire" has a record for making things happen.

A few months ago he was approached by the production company of reality television producer Mark Burnett, creator of *Survivor*, *The Apprentice* and *Contender*, offering him a place in a series that will take the winner to space.

Burnett's company is selling 20 adventure millionaires around the world the opportunity to go up to the International Space Station — mankind's only outpost in space.

The 20 chosen for the proposed *Survivor: Space* must each put up \$1 million to take part.

They will be tested and trained for six months in the Russian space program, and will be progressively eliminated until only two remain.

The dramatic conclusion will see two finalists walk out to a launching pad in Kazakhstan, and one will be chosen to blast off into mankind's last frontier.

Even Nik Halik can't imagine a more exciting scenario than that.