

A Daredevil Flat-Earther Died After Attempting To Launch Himself 5,000 Feet With A Homemade Rocket

"Mad" Mike Hughes at times said his rocket launches aimed to prove the Earth's shape, but a representative told BuzzFeed News that was all for publicity.

By Otilia Steadman

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"Mad" Mike Hughes in 2018.

James Quigg / AP

A daredevil who espoused flat Earth conspiracies died on Saturday after falling from a homemade rocket.

"Mad" Mike Hughes, a former limo driver who billed himself as "the world's greatest daredevil," was attempting to launch himself 5,000 feet into the air on a steam-powered rocket when his parachute failed.

In a video of the incident posted by freelance writer Justin Chapman, the parachute rips off immediately after launch; moments later, Hughes falls through the air and crashes to the ground in the desert near Barstow, California, as people present at the scene gasp.

Justin Chapman

@justindchapman

Mad Mike Hughes just launched himself in a self-made steam-powered rocket and crash landed. Very likely did not survive. #MadMike #MadMikeHughes

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"When the rocket was nosediving and he didn't release the three other parachutes he had in the rocket, lots of people screamed out and started wailing," Chapman told BuzzFeed News in an email. "Everyone was stunned when he crashed and didn't know what to do."

The Science Channel, which had been chronicling Hughes's attempt for a show called *Homemade Astronauts*, confirmed his death, saying, "It was always his dream to do this launch & Science Channel was there to chronicle his journey."

Hughes — who holds the Guinness World Record for longest limousine ramp jump for a 103-foot jump in a stretch Lincoln Town Car in 2002 — had been working toward an attempt to reach the spot where the Earth's atmosphere meets outer space, about 62 miles above the Earth's surface.

For a previous launch in 2018, he had reached about 1,900 feet.

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Hughes was a larger-than-life figure who talked about flat Earth and Moon landing conspiracies as he attempted to draw attention to his rocket stunts.

In 2018, Hughes told the AP he wanted to do the launch because he believed the Earth was flat. "Do I believe the Earth is shaped like a Frisbee? I believe it is," he said. "Do I know for sure? No. That's why I want to go up in space."

On Saturday, a public relations representative disputed Hughes' flat Earth beliefs, telling BuzzFeed News that the argument had helped him raise money but that he didn't actually believe it.

"We used flat Earth as a PR stunt. Period," Darren Shuster told BuzzFeed News. "He was a true daredevil decades before the latest round of rocket missions. Flat Earth allowed us to get so much publicity that we kept going! I know he didn't believe in flat Earth and it was a shtick."

In a July 2019 appearance on Fox Business, Hughes identified himself as a "flat Earth believer" and said that the sun could not be 93 million miles from Earth — while also joking about his cats and his former career dream of being a road manager for the Spice Girls.

In August 2019, he told Space.com his launch was inspired by President Trump and walked back his earlier statement to AP that his plans were motivated by a desire to prove flat Earth theories.

"I believe the Earth is flat," Hughes told Space.com. But "this flat Earth has nothing to do with the steam rocket launches," he added. "It never did. It never will. I'm a daredevil!"

Hughes had worked with general contractor Waldo Stakes to build the steam-powered rockets. The launches had each been fraught with

Issues: it was canceled and rescheduled due to weather, disputes with

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the Bureau of Land Management, and technical challenges. A previous attempt to reach the 5,000-foot mark had been thwarted due to a faulty heater purchased on Craigslist, [according to Space.com](#).

"This thing wants to kill you 10 different ways," Hughes told AP in 2018.

In a promotional video posted by the Science Channel, Hughes showed off the rocket he would use on Saturday and the vehicle intended to go up 62 miles.

"We think the top speed will be 425 miles an hour," Hughes said of the launch.

"People ask me why I do stuff like this," he said toward the end of the video, "and basically it's just to convince people they can do things extraordinary with their lives. And maybe it pushes people to do things that they normally wouldn't do with their life, and maybe it'll inspire someone else."



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