

Travel



EIFFEL TOWER and fountains.

Eiffel tower history— pad to launch pad

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The Eiffel Tower offers the most exhilarating elevator ride known to man, one which tests the heart of the most stalwart soul.

Many get off at the midway station when they realize they can't stomach the idea of earth dropping away from beneath them one more foot.

But, if you zoom all the way to the top — nearly 1,000 feet — you can not only hear your heart pound louder, you'll also hear about how the architectural masterpiece of iron was built by the engineer Alexandre Eiffel, who also built the framework for the Statue of Liberty and who designed the locks for the Panama Canal.

He must have been a very strange bird, indeed, because he liked to hide from the world in his apartment at the top of the tower, which always sways in the wind. What a stomach he must have had.

I was on top of the Eiffel Tower with my former husband, a very funny man who was also an inventor and who had just designed a paper airplane he wanted to enter in the Great International Airplane Contest. He figured the Eiffel Tower was the ideal launch pad for the test flight of this plane, which was as big as one might expect from a folded piece of typing paper. It had a snub nose, as I recall, and wings that swept up a little on the ends.

Dick had the plane ready when we

got to the top, and while Parisians and other tourists milled around casually, he stepped to the edge of the platform (I think I was on my hands and knees holding onto his pants legs), he stroked the wings and gave it the supreme launch. A couple of spectators rushed over the watch.

The plane soared and soared. And soared.

It headed toward the Seine River, circled back to the tower and then glided back up, as if it would land on the platform.

The few spectators cheered. That attracted more spectators.

The plane then circled and headed back toward the Seine. By now no less than 50 people crowded the launch site. The plane banked left and paralleled the river in the direction of Notre Dame, and then, unbelievably, it banked again and came back toward the tower.

An enormous cheer went up from from about 100 people now crowding the launch site, and another elevatorful rushed over. The tower began to bend in that direction.

Soon, it was a day at the races. People began to shout — in French, German, Swiss, Italian, English, Swahili — things like "Go, Go" or "Go over there" or A droite" or A gauche."

It went on for over an hour.

The plane circled, banked, soared up, down, a droite and a gauche. More people were being shuttled up by eleva-

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tor and the operators below were beginning to wonder why no one was coming back down. The great iron structure was bending like one of Frost's birch trees.

As the plane finally disappeared over the Seine, people of all nationalities rushed at Dick, pumped his hand enthusiastically and then made such a rush for the elevator that the tower did a reverse sway.

The Parisian newspapers headlined the event the next day, something about the tower bending a droite and a gauche, and although Dick never did win the Great International Airplane Contest, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his plane was probably the only one that had such an effect on a monument as historic as the Eiffel Tower.