

The time Richard Branson's UFO prank in London went badly wrong and the Army were called

The epic prank almost got the billionaire arrested

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This epic prank almost got the billionaire arrested (Image: Twitter/ Richard Branson)

April Fool's day can sometimes be an excuse for some pretty outrageous behaviour. In 1989, maverick billionaire Richard Branson decided to use the pranking holiday to his advantage but almost ended up being arrested. His prank, named after his Virgin Galactic concept, caused mass panic, gridlock traffic, the police being mobilised and even the army being put on standby.

At 5am on April 1, the trickle of morning commuters heading into London on the M25 saw an oddly shaped object with flashing lights moving through the sky. Motorists stopped on the motorway to get a better look at the "spacecraft" and the police were quickly informed of the UFO hovering above an area of Surrey just South of the capital.

Apparently, Branson, who was manning what turned out to be a hot air balloon shaped like a UFO, intended to land the craft in **Hyde Park** but due to bad weather conditions was blown off course and into Surrey. "It was lucky a serious accident did not occur," Chief Inspector Andrew Neilson at Surrey police headquarters said at the time. "A danger was caused to motorists who stopped to look at the sky instead of the road."



Virgin Galactic turned from a dream into reality after years of development by the company (Image: Twitter/Richard Branson)

Branson was quoted as saying: "We were flying at 5 a.m. and there were not that many motorists about at that time. I think most people took it in good humour and I do not believe that any danger was caused. If it was, I apologize."

"I had a friend on the flight with me and when we took off this morning, hundreds of people were emerging from their houses. At one stage police cars were in hot pursuit," he added. According to one source when the balloon finally landed a person with dwarfism—also on board—emerged down the platform in an ET costume with dry ice releasing steam in the background.

Branson continued: "When we landed, three policemen with their truncheons out came creeping across the field towards us. One of them said 'I have never been so scared in 20 years of being a policeman. It sure is good to see you, Richard'. They also took it in good humor, although one was annoyed when he realised he'd been had."

Recently the billionaire confirmed the incident on Twitter writing: "We pulled a prank and flew a UFO over London many years ago (called Virgin Galactic Airways) – now we're flying spaceships for real."

Branson is focused on trying to make commercial flights into space a regular pastime for the rich and powerful. On July 11, 2021 the space tourism company Virgin Galactic successfully launched its founder Richard Branson and five other crewmembers into suborbital space however commercial flights have been delayed after the first one was set for the third quarter of 2022.

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