

Richard Branson recalls the April Fool's prank that almost got him arrested

By [Kahla Preston](#) | 3 years ago



Richard Branson shares 'April Falls' video

Typically, April Fool's Day pranks elicit a laugh (at best) or a groan (in 99.3 per cent of cases, rough estimate).

However, in some instances they draw a more extreme reaction — like, say, having the army and multiple police forces put on alert.

That's an achievement Virgin founder and longtime April Fools trickster Sir Richard Branson can boast.



Richard Branson has pulled off some impressive pranks in his time. (GC Images)

[In a new blog post on the Virgin website](#), the business magnate reflects on 50 years of April 1 jokes, which he describes as one of his "favourite pastimes of the year".

Branson's proudest effort occurred in 1989, when his company flew a UFO — well, a hot air balloon decked out with silver casing and some flashing lights — over London.

"By the time we'd reached the motorway it was beginning to get light," he recalls. "We could see every single vehicle grinding to a halt and hundreds of people looking up at the UFO flying over them. It was great fun watching their reactions." The Virgin team had even written Virgin Galactic Airways on the side of the 'flying saucer', long before its commercial spaceline became a reality.

What Branson and his crew didn't realise as they admired their handiwork, however, was that three police forces had been mobilised and the army had been alerted. The UFO sighting was also being reported on by radio and TV stations.

"The police surrounded us and then sent one lone policeman with his truncheon across the field to greet the alien," he continues.

"The UFO's door opened very slowly, with plenty of dry ice billowing from it.



Branson drew inspiration from ET for his UFO alien costume. (Universal Pictures)

"ET (ok, somebody in an ET costume!) walked down the platform towards the policeman. He quickly spun around and sprinted off back where he had come from!"

As well as [stopping traffic on the highway nearby](#), the prank almost ended in jail time.

"To begin with, the police didn't see the funny side of it and threatened to arrest us for wasting their time," Branson writes.

"Thankfully, they soon joined in the fun and left with smiles on their faces."

In his post, Branson muses on how pranks were "a little simpler to pull off" before the rise of the internet and more recent prevalence of misinformation — phenomena he believes have complicated the art of the April Fool's Day joke.

Rather than launch a UFO into the skies, Branson has marked the occasion this year with a short Instagram video showing him jumping over the shadows of a wind turbine's blades before being 'tripped' by one.

"While April Fool's Day may not quite be the same this year, I wanted to do something small to bring a smile to people's faces: so here's my April Falls!" he wrote.

Sorry to say, but it's a groan from us this time.