

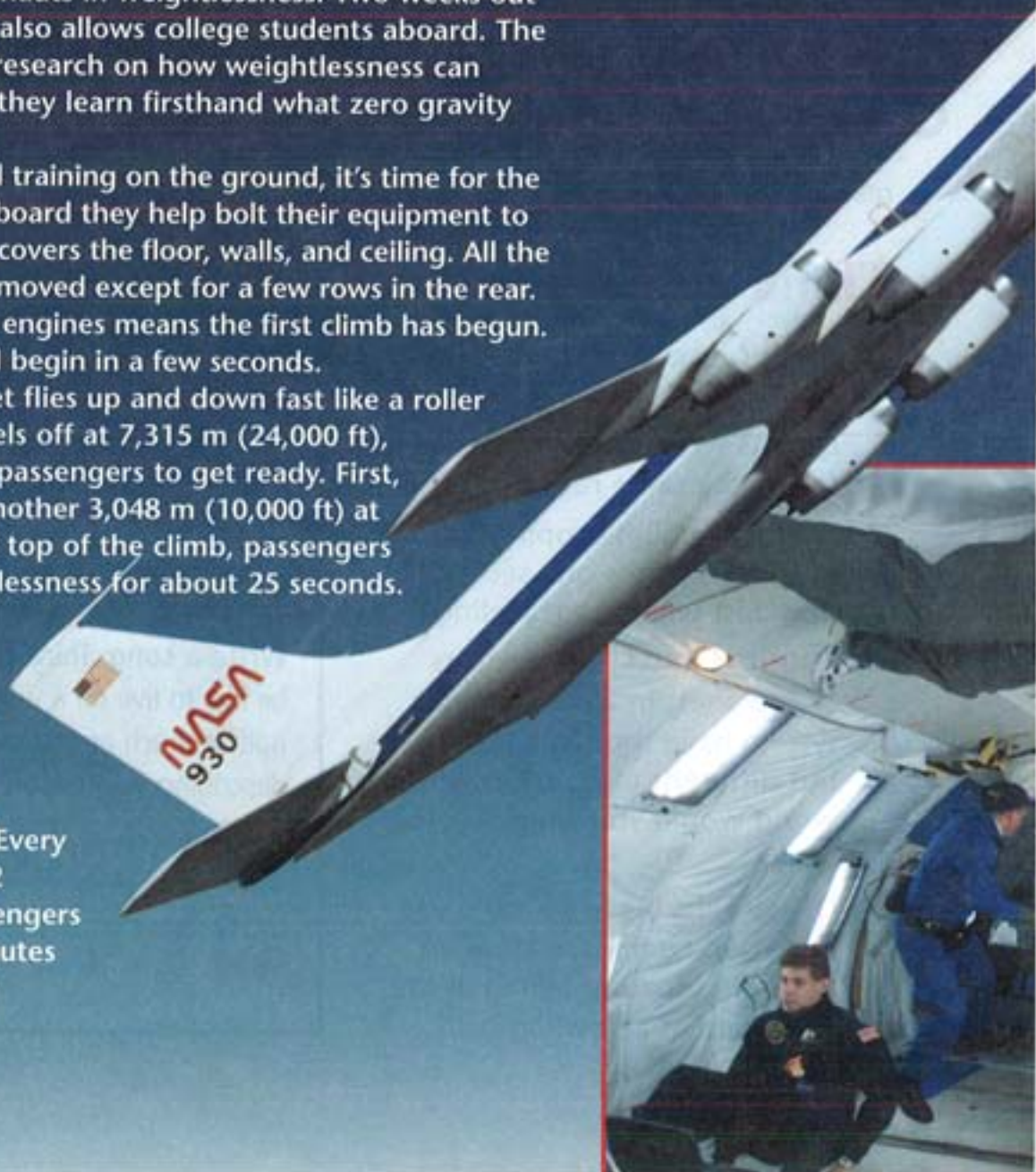
Amazing Stories

RIDE THE "VOMIT COMET"

It's called the "Vomit Comet," and students can't wait to go on it! It's not an amusement park ride, but it can feel like one. The Vomit Comet is a special NASA aircraft used to train astronauts in weightlessness. Two weeks out of the year, NASA also allows college students aboard. The students conduct research on how weightlessness can affect things, and they learn firsthand what zero gravity feels like.

After testing and training on the ground, it's time for the students to fly. Onboard they help bolt their equipment to the floor. Padding covers the floor, walls, and ceiling. All the seats have been removed except for a few rows in the rear. A deep roar of the engines means the first climb has begun. Weightlessness will begin in a few seconds.

The Vomit Comet flies up and down fast like a roller coaster ride. It levels off at 7,315 m (24,000 ft), and the pilot tells passengers to get ready. First, the plane climbs another 3,048 m (10,000 ft) at high speed. At the top of the climb, passengers experience weightlessness for about 25 seconds. Then, the plane dives 3,048 m (10,000 ft) at high speed. Each climb and dive is called a parabola. Every flight has about 32 parabolas, so passengers have about 13 minutes of weightlessness!



At first, weightlessness is scary. That's because you feel like you're falling. Then, you feel excited because you realize you're floating in space! The hardest part for the students is concentrating on what's happening with their experiments.

They have only 25 seconds before the dive!

The dive feels very different. Your body feels much heavier than usual. You can hardly lift your arms. Any

movement can make you feel very dizzy. That's because the force you feel pulling down on you is twice the force of gravity.

By the ninth or tenth parabola, some students suffer from motion sickness. They head for the seats in the rear and strap themselves in. It's up to the others to finish the experiments. When it's over, even the sick students say it was the ride of a lifetime. For a short time, they felt just like an astronaut!

Astronauts in training experience several minutes of weightlessness on the Vomit Comet.

What Did I Learn?

- The Vomit Comet is
 - an amusement park ride.
 - a NASA aircraft used to train astronauts in weightlessness.
 - a special section for student experiments on the space shuttle.
 - a strange object from outer space.
- About how long are the students weightless on a Vomit Comet flight?
 - about 13 minutes
 - about 25 seconds
 - about a day
 - about 30 minutes

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