

**TEST FLIGHT:** Pilots parachute from round-the-world aircraft

# Pioneering plane crashes

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A LIGHT aircraft that flew around the world is now at the bottom of the sea off Tinley Manor Beach, north of Durban.

Carlos Garcia-Cabral and Sean Fraser, who were doing a test flight in the Sling plane on Saturday, ejected and parachuted to the beach before the plane plunged into the sea.

James Pitman, the co-owner of the plane, was yesterday relieved that the pilots survived, but "devastated" over the loss of the prototype plane.

"That's why we do test flights, to see what a plane can do and what its limits of safe operation are, but it's sad to lose it now, after our



PHOTO: CHARL DU PLESSIS

James Pitman and Mike Blyth in their Sling plane after they flew it round the world last August.

flight around the world," he said.

"To get the plane ready for production, certain tests and procedures have to be done. The two pilots were busy with the testing programme. Part of that is to put the plane into a flat spin and recover.

"It was done successfully. Then they did it again, but did not recover fast enough," Pitman said.

"The procedure was then to shoot a parachute out of the plane nose and bring the plane down in a controlled way. The parachute didn't deploy correctly, and the pilots, who were both wearing parachutes, opened the cockpit roof at about 1 200 metres above sea level and bailed out."

They both landed on the beach with slight injuries.

Pitman and Mike Blyth, the co-developer and owner of the Sling, flew it round the world last July and August to demonstrate its reliability.

"We had a certificate from the Civil Aviation Authority to fly the plane, but this weekend's testing was part of the programme to let us begin mass production.

"For Mike and I, it is devastating to think that the plane that we flew for 40 days and nights around the world is no more.

"The plane drifted for about two hours, and just as the police were about to tow it to the beach, it disappeared beneath the waves," Pitman said.

"We will build another one and continue, but it won't be that one."