

Price war win for drivers

George Lekakis

A PRICE war is brewing in car insurance, with one of the world's biggest discount insurers preparing to invade the Australian market.

Progressive Direct, the fourth biggest car insurer in the US, will today launch an internet-only car insurance policy aimed at families and young drivers.

It will begin marketing insurance bundled with the option of pet injury cover.

If a policy-holder's dog or cat is injured in a car accident, Progressive will pay up to \$1000 of the animal's medical expenses.

"We are committed to providing great cover, and we know many of our target customers own pets that spend time in the car," said the company's Australian chief, Simon Lindsay.

"So like we do in other markets, we decided to cover pets at no additional charge."

Mr Lindsay said Progressive's auto cover would be much cheaper than most other insurers because the company would be operating as a low-cost provider exclusively via the internet.

"We're designed for people who prefer to skip call centres when buying car insurance or do basic policy updates themselves," Mr Lindsay said.

"Our customers get not only online control and convenience, but also great value because they can customise their own policy and don't pay for sales and administrative support they don't need."

Australia's car owners have suffered big increases in premiums in the past year, with the average cost rising more than \$75 or 12 per cent with most insurers.

According to market research firm Canstar-Cannex, Commonwealth Bank, Allianz and RACV are the most expensive insurers in the state, while Budget Direct and Real Insurance are the cheapest.

Most insurers, though not all, offer discounts to drivers aged above 60.

Hawke turns 80

FORMER prime minister Bob Hawke today celebrates his 80th birthday.

Mr Hawke, one of the country's most popular leaders, served eight years in the top job.

He retired from Parliament soon after losing the prime ministership to Paul Keating in December 1991.

Mr Hawke, who lives in Sydney, is expected to celebrate in private with family and friends.

Journey into the future

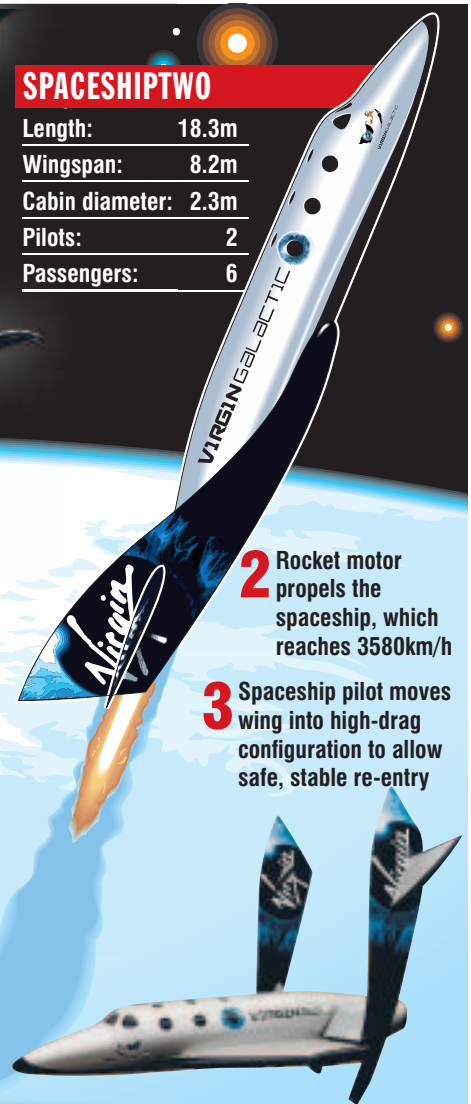
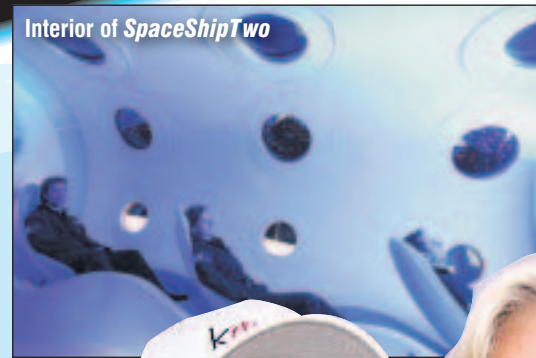
White Knight launch aircraft

Interior of SpaceShipTwo

1 White Knight releases SpaceShipTwo at an altitude of 15,200m

2 Rocket motor propels the spaceship, which reaches 3580km/h

3 Spaceship pilot moves wing into high-drag configuration to allow safe, stable re-entry



RUSLAN KOGAN

RICHARD BRANSON

What you get for \$220,000

Passenger: Ruslan Kogan, founder and CEO Kogan Technologies, Melbourne

When: 2012

Lift off: Mojave desert, Nevada, United States

Speed: three times the speed of sound

Duration: three hours. Includes up to 20 minutes in zero gravity above the Earth

heraldsun.com.au [Virgin on history: See pictures of the new Branson spaceship](#)

Heavenly joy flight

Greg Thom
technology reporter

Retailer in queue for space tour

RUSLAN Kogan has always dreamed of jetting into space.

Yesterday he moved one step closer to his goal.

The Melbourne-based online electronics retailer and gadget enthusiast was among a group of amateur astronauts who met Virgin entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson yesterday at the unveiling of the world's first spacecraft designed to take tourists to the stars.

Founder and CEO of

Kogan Technologies, Mr Kogan, 27, has paid \$220,000 for the privilege of securing a seat on Sir Richard's pioneering Virgin Galactic flight.

Speaking from Nevada's Mojave desert, where he met Sir Richard over a lunch celebrating the unveiling of the Virgin space shuttle, Mr Kogan said he has always had one eye on the sky.

"I did as a little kid tell my mum I wanted to be an astronaut and all that sort of stuff,

but I got over it by about seven or eight," he said.

"You don't even really think that it's a possibility, but then a few years ago when I first heard that Branson was doing this program, I just started following it.

"It's (spaceflight) something you have always wanted to do but never actually thought would become a reality or be possible.

"Now it's pretty much about to happen."

While his flight to the heavens is still a couple of years away, Mr Kogan said meeting Sir Richard and seeing the rocket ship that will carry him into space made the experience very real.

The specially designed spacecraft was unveiled to the world amid much pomp and ceremony, according to Mr Kogan. "It was pretty exciting. The whole crowd went wild," he said.

Mr Kogan said he person-

ally quizzed Sir Richard on how the program was progressing, particularly any safety issues.

"He had the best answer for that. He said 'My family are going on the first flight'. So you know that safety is not being overlooked," he said.

Mr Kogan said his own love of technology and gadgets, combined with admiration for Sir Richard's fearless approach to opening up new business frontiers from mobile phones to airlines, was what attracted him to sign up.

Virgin's ship can take six passengers at a time. About 300 people have signed up.



See the Wild Sea liftout in this issue.

The stars of Wild Sea are arriving!



Herald Sun