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# ABC Supply Southern Wisconsin Airfest

FLY-INS & AIR SHOWS

Story & Photos by Geoff Sobering



Mike Wiskus makes a pass in the Lucas Oil Pitts with Rich's Incredible Pyro in the background.

**T**he 2009 ABC Supply Company Southern Wisconsin Airfest in Janesville, Wisconsin, May 29-31, pulled an estimated crowd of 50,000 fans. The Navy's Blue Angels were the headliner act. Rounding out the show was an outstanding collection of military and civilian performers with high-energy aerobatics covered particularly well.

For the traditionalists who think all aerobatic airplanes should have two wings (and be painted red), Mike Wiskus brought his bright red and white Lucas Oil Pitts S-1-11B with its Barrett Performance Lycoming IO-540 engine. This plane can roll and climb with the best of them and Wiskus really knows how to get the most out of it.

The newest aircraft design at the show was Greg Poe's MX-2. Poe is sponsored by Fagen, Inc., a builder and operator of ethanol plants, so not only is his all-carbon airplane state-of-the-art, but the ethanol fuel he uses

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(LEFT TOP/BOTTOM) Susan Dacy in her 450 Stearman 'Big Red.'  
 (TOP RIGHT) Mike Wiskus in the Lucas Oil Pitts S-1-11B.  
 (BOTTOM RIGHT) Thousands of cameras in action.

in his Lycon-built IO-540 is also on the cutting edge of technology.

Another high-performance plane (and pilot!) at the show was Patty Wagstaff, flying her Cirrus-sponsored Extra-300S.

For the folks who like traditional barnstorming aerobatics, Janesville local Susan Dacy rolled her Super Stearman, "Big Red," out of its hangar and put it through its paces for the crowd.

A real treat this year was Vlado Lenoč and his P-51 Mustang "Moonbeam McSwine." At most airshows, Lenoč only flies in the "Heritage Flight," alongside a modern U.S. jet fighter, like the F-15, F-16, or F-22. At Janesville this year, he also performed his solo aerobatic routine. For people who love the unique sound of the V-12 Merlin engine and the classic lines of the P-51, this was a very special experience. Vlado Lenoč is known for his precise piloting, and all of his performances were absolutely perfect!

Fans of a different sound, jet engines, weren't forgotten by Airfest organizers, either. Of course the six F-18s of the U.S. Navy Blue Angels were the main attraction, but the U.S. Air Force Viper East F-16 demo team was also present. And, of course, with an Air Force jet and Vlado Lenoč's P-51 at the same airshow, there had to be a Heritage Flight. Personally, I think the simple formation passes in the Heritage Flight are one of the most enjoyable parts of any airshow.

It's almost inconceivable that an airshow in southern Wisconsin wouldn't have dramatic pyrotechnics, courtesy of the 2003 Art Scholl Showmanship Award recipient, "Rich's Incredible Pyro." Owners/producers, Rich and Dee

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(L/R) U.S. Navy Blue Angels; U.S. Army Golden Knights in a twilight show; and Vlado Lench performs a "Heritage Flight" in his P-51 Mustang with a U.S. Air Force F-16 Falcon.

Gibson, were not out to set any world records at Janesville this year, but even their "run of the mill" effects are quite spectacular.

At Airfest, Rich's explosions set the backdrop for Les Shockley's Super Shockwave jet-truck. First, Jeremy Fields, Super Shockwave's driver, ran the truck around the show area, creating clouds of smoke and spitting fire out of the afterburners attached to the two Pratt & Whitney J-34 jet engines. While this was going on, Mike Wiskus buzzed around in his Pitts harassing him. Then Fields lined up at the end of the runway and waited for Wiskus to come by and they raced down the runway. I wasn't keeping score over the weekend, but I think they were pretty closely matched.

Parachute demonstrations are a necessity at any airshow. This year Airfest organizers weren't content to have just one team. Both the U.S. Army Golden Knights and the U.S. Navy Leap Frogs parachute demonstration teams were there. The two teams complement each other nicely, since the Golden Knights are known for their free-fall formations, while the Leap Frogs specialize more on "canopy work," formations with the parachutes open. The two teams also collaborated on a couple of

jumps, with formations made up of members of both teams together.

Airfest is a real three-day event, starting with a Friday afternoon practice show that's not nominally open to the public, although there seemed to be quite a few people

watching from the terminal building and around the airport. Later Friday evening, there is a public twilight performance; this year it was a "per car" admission price. Quite a few fans showed up; the entire flightline was

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 62**



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### **SOUTHERN WISCONSIN AIRFEST FROM PAGE 47**

solidly packed. The performances were timed so that the flying acts finished just in time for the Leap Frogs to do a twilight jump with the sun setting behind them, followed by a pyrotechnic-enhanced night jump by the Golden Knights after dark. The finale was a night run by Shockwave with Rich's Incredible Pyro in the background – a great way to end the day and start the weekend.

Saturday brought more great airshow weather, with just a bit of high cloud cover. It started out a bit cool and cloudy early in the morning, and attendance looked like it might be low, but at 11:00 am, the sky cleared, temperatures rose, and people started streaming through the gates.

Later in the day I spoke with Rick Fiduccia, one of the airshow committee members, and he said that when the crowds started coming in, he was drafted into selling tickets to help keep the lines moving.

There were some gaps in the schedule while the Golden Knights' and Leap Frogs' jump planes climbed to altitude. While there wasn't much

### **THUNDER ON LAKESHORE FROM PAGE 51**

are still in front of the crowd, and the F-18 demonstration includes a touch-and-go landing right at show center (with a full-afterburner climb that's always a hit). On Sunday, both the F-16 and F-18 demos did their dramatic (and loud) afterburner minimum-radius turns at show-center,

going on, I decided to wander away from my usual "front and center" spot, right at the fence and see how the show looked from other vantage points. I discovered many people who prefer to watch the show from a bit further back. Some of them are locals with hangars or businesses on the airport. For example, Jim Freeman of Helicopter Specialties has a hangar just back from show-center. There were rows of chairs setup outside the hangar with people milling around enjoying the show, and barbecue cooking on an assortment of grills. Everybody was having a great time and the view was pretty good, too. It was especially exciting when the Blue Angels flew directly over the hangar. I also ran into a fellow photographer, Sam Dammers, who was spending time away from his camera and in front of his drawing pad sketching planes and people at the show.

Sunday was an absolutely gorgeous day from sunrise, and there was no question that attendance would be high.

With the perfect weather the show went off perfectly. The schedule had

too. Hearing protection was a "must have," and that's always a sign of a good jet demonstration.

This year was special for me. Friday morning airshow performer Matt Chapman, who was there to help his friend Michael Goulian, took me up in the team's Cessna 182 Skylane for a photo session with Michael's Extra 330SC. Later in the afternoon,

Wisconsin, on November 4, 1909.

To celebrate this historic event, Michael Goc and Tom Thomas of WAHF will present, "The First Thing I Knew, I Was Flying." Sponsored by the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame and the La Crosse County Historical Society, this lively presentation tells how Warner brought Wisconsin into the age of aviation, and includes stories about early La Crosse-area aviation history. The presentation takes place on Wednesday, August 5 at 6:30 p.m. at the La Crosse County

been rearranged to fill the previous day's gaps, so there was always something going on. The air boss, Dave Schultz, allowed me to shoot from in front of the command trailer at show-center. The Continental Air Show Productions sound system technicians were friendly and helpful, as they always are.

Since I wasn't able to take time to wander around the grounds and meet new people, I was happy when three people joined us at show-center. They introduced themselves as the members of the "Blue Angels Fan Club." Carol Moorehouse from Colona, Illinois, is the president and founded the club in 1996. Mariyln and Gary White are members from Iowa who drove to Janesville for the show. It was great to see them enjoy the show, and especially the Blue Angels performance.

The Southern Wisconsin Airfest is a great event to open the Wisconsin airshow season. ABC Supply Company and the other sponsors help bring in the best performers, and after 8 years running, the show is established on the Midwest airshow calendar. □

I flew with John Mohr in his Stock Stearman and took photos of Jim Maroney's Super-Chipmunk.

While the weather did not cooperate 100% this year, the Manitowoc fans got a full show every day due to the extraordinary efforts of Curt Drumm, air-boss Wayne Boggs, the performers, and all of the staff and volunteers. □

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

### **The First Thing I Knew, I Was Flying!**

OSHKOSH, WIS. – The Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame (WAHF) has planned a series of 2009 events celebrating Wisconsin's Centennial of Flight, including history presentations and a traveling exhibit of a quarter-scale replica of the first airplane that flew in Wisconsin. That first Wisconsin powered flight happened when Arthur Pratt Warner flew a 1909 Curtiss biplane from a farmer's field in Beloit,

Historical Society's Swarthout Museum, 9th and Main Streets, La Crosse. The public is invited to attend.

The exhibit and quarter-scale replica of Warner's 1909 Curtiss biplane, built by members of the Experimental Aircraft Association's Chapter 60 in Beloit/Janesville, will be on display at the Swarthout Museum through August 31.

For more information and tickets for the August 5 presentation, call the La Crosse County Historical Society at 608-782-1980. □