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Thunder On The Lakeshore Features Air & Space Greats!

Story & Photos by Geoff Sobering

With 16 years of experience, Curt Drumm of Lakeshore Aviation, and the Thunder on the entire Lakeshore air show committee, have a pretty good idea of what makes for a good air show and how to make it happen. This year's show was held June 6-8 at the Manitowoc County Airport (MTW), Manitowoc, Wis.

Starting off each show was the Canadian Skyhawks Parachute Team. Their specialty is "multi-person canopy work," where two or more skydivers link together and fly their parachute canopies in various combinations.

John Mohr returned for his 15th year at Thunder on the Lakeshore. Chosen as one of the best air show performers by *Smithsonian Air & Space Magazine* in 2007, John gets his stock 220 hp vintage Stearman biplane to do things that no other pilot can, like hovering before the crowd, nearly touching the crowd, and moving at what seems to be about 20 kts.

Steve Oliver, and his wife Suzanne Asbury-Oliver, were also listed in *Air & Space Magazine's "Guide to the Greats."* They returned to Manitowoc with their Oregon Aero Super Chipmunk. During the day, Steve flies his "SkyDancer" aerobatic routine. At

night, with pyrotechnics bolted to the ends of the wing, he transforms the plane into the "FireDancer." Suzanne uses the plane for old-fashioned sky-writing when Steve isn't flying.

Another long-time performer at the show, Fowler "Big Dog" Carey, was grounded due to mechanical problems with his T-33 jet. Luckily, Paul Keppeler stepped in with his Canadair T-33 Silver Star. Even though he wasn't performing, Fowler still came to the show, and was a particularly active participant in the charity auction at the Friday night party.

Fans of high-intensity aerobatics got great performances from Michael Vaknin with his Extra 300L and John Klatt flying the "Air National Guard" Staudacher S300D.

Another regular at Manitowoc, Vlado Lench, couldn't bring his P-51 Mustang "Moonbeam McSwine" this year because it was in the final stages of a complete rebuild. Thankfully he was able to find a "loaner" Mustang to fly in the U.S. Air Force "Heritage Flight" with the "Viper East" F-16.

Rounding out the bill was the formation flying team of Harvey Meek, Paul Hornick, and David Monroe in their "Team Aerostars" Yak-52s, and a U.S. Air Force F-16 Falcon.

Weather is an ever-present com-

ponent of air shows, and in 2007, fog prevented Steve Oliver from flying his "pyrobatics" routine over the "balloon glow" at the harbor Saturday night. This year, high winds and scattered storms were the story all weekend. Luckily, the storms in the area kept clear of Manitowoc Friday evening and Saturday, and all the performers were able to perform. The high winds, however, kept the hot-air balloons in their trailers for the "balloon glow" planned for Friday and Saturday nights. Undaunted, Saturday evening the resourceful balloonists unpacked their baskets and entertained the crowd downtown with huge bursts of flame from their burners. An unplanned extra for the downtown revelers was a full-afterburner fly-by by the Canadian CF-18 jets as they arrived Saturday night.

The good luck with weather ended Sunday. Morning rain delayed the start of the air show, and just as the rain stopped, the wind switched to the east and blew fog inland from Lake Michigan. At about 2:00 p.m., it was clear the show would have to be cancelled.

Thunder on the Lakeshore is my favorite small air show in Wisconsin (maybe even my favorite air show, period). The venue is small and intimate, the performers are top notch, and the variety from balloons through jets is great. □