

Tucson Aerobatics Shootout 2007

What can we envy them? Sunshine, more sunshine, and perfect flying weather. Our season is unfortunately short and there is little time to perfect our skills - this explains the huge difference between their and our standards of flying.

I flew into Tucson on Thursday evening, and on Friday morning I was already in the "lion's jaws", meaning the huge model airfield on the far suburbs of the city, where the world's major flying giant championships were taking place. In Europe this is called F3M class.

There were four models in the air at any one time. A competition took place with Known and Unknown programmes for the Advance and Unlimited classes. Three independent groups of judges had their gazes fixed on their assigned models - the air was as crowded as a city street. But thanks to the superb organization, everything went off as perfectly as a Paramount Picture production. While some landed others were taking off, and others were still in the middle of their programmes. Even the strong side-wind didn't cause any problems - landing just had to be done across rather than along the runway. The not insignificant wind seemed not to affect the models, which flew as if on a tightrope within the American fly zone. This is excellently planned, so that even the compulsory programme is interesting to watch, as the models fly relatively close and low. The flying box is situated about 25 metres from the competitor and is 600 m long, 300m wide and 300 m high.

The standard presented by those taking part was excellent, but the height of perfection was the flights in the highest class, the invitational section, which included the best flyers from all over the world. The standard was so high that when watching their flights it was hard to perceive any faults in their technique or even any difference between the various competitors. The figures from the Known and Unknown programmes were very difficult, interwoven with negative and positive snaps in various configurations, and the

programme seemed to have been put together on several levels. The execution of the Unknown programmes looked so perfect that you would think the pilots had been practising the programmes for ages.

The aircraft gave everything they had, executing several complex figures at once in a vertical series. The engines from Desert Aircraft (DA) performed excellently - none of the several dozen models suffered engine breakdown. Foreign engines included one 3W 275 in a 50% Extra 260, and one Brazilian Kroma 180. As far as the planes are concerned the pilots didn't use just any old equipment - the most popular were American models from firms such as CARDEN, AEROWORKS and DALTON AVIATION, mainly Extra 260s and Yaks. The best-represented and most visible European firm was COMPOSITE-ARF, with its many Extra 260s. Absent from the competition were Jason Shulman and Andrew Jewsky, who favour those models - otherwise there would have been another two Extras. Also making a mark was Krill Models from the Czech Republic, with its 3-metre Katana. This was the choice of three pilots: two from Europe and one American. Unfortunately this model didn't do too well in the compulsory programmes, finishing well down the order.

The models seemed to be equipped in very uniform fashion, with JR or Futaba servos everywhere, propellers mainly from the Czech firm Mejzlik, and lithium ion batteries from Duralite, Fromeco or TBM.

At last it was the Saturday everyone had been waiting for - the start of the freestyle competition! The stand was filled to the last seat, and there were also hundreds of people who had brought their own equipment (not for flying of course, but for sitting!)

Yes, flying to music is fascinating when you are gazing at the flying aircraft, and when a model gets dangerously close to the ground the cheers and whistles inspire the pilot to still greater bravado. It is not easy to work out a freestyle programme with music which will delight the crowd - in fact it is extremely hard. Actually flying all these extreme manoeuvres is not difficult; with good equipment you can learn everything fast, in contrast to classical aerobatics, which takes a good few seasons to master. To put

together such a free programme and select appropriate music is truly an art. The 15-year-old Austrian Gernot Bruckman succeeded wonderfully, seeing off the Americans to take first place in the freestyle competition.

The freestyle event continued over to Sunday, In total on Saturday and Sunday there were three rounds, two of which carried points.

Every international competition event like this, where I get to watch the cream of the world's pilots in action, helps me immeasurably in my hobby. Firstly I can learn by looking and observing - I think to myself that since they fly the same planes with the same engines as I have, and execute such risky manoeuvres, then I can do it too, as long as I am brave enough. Secondly, by looking at the equipment they use, I have no difficulty making the right choice, as I buy the same accessories which have been tried and tested by them, and which are normally not any more expensive than those servos, for example, which are in widespread use here.

See you in Tucson 2008!

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