



# Wesbank Botswana International airshow

By Athol Franz

A fantastic airshow took place on Saturday 16 May at Matsieng airfield north of Gaborone complete with an excellent full colour printed programme! I hope the organisers of the SAAF's airshow at AFB Swartkop will take note! As before Hentie De Wet and his airshow team comprising family members and staff from De Wet Drilling staged an incredible experience. The Botswana airshow has become one of the most significant airshows on the southern African calendar and this year the show attracted many South African aviators who flew in to attend.

*Overview - Athol Franz*





*Nigel Hopkins in his MX2 - Garth Calitz*



*MX2 and RV-8 formation - Charles Hugo*

Wesbank and Botswana Tourism, amongst other mainly Botswanan companies, were the main sponsors of this year's airshow which drew a crowd of just short of 15 000 people, many of which came from South Africa. In addition other sponsors were AirTeam, Absolute Aviation, Saab's Barracuda, mobile camouflagenet, Nedbank Botswana and others. Chris Briers, CEO of AirTeam was the show director and he ensured that the show was very safe throughout the day.

Well done to the organisers and all the pilots who flew in the show. It was also great to meet up with so many aviators from all over South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. What a venue and such wonderful weather. Thank you Derek Hopkins for flying us there and back safely in the Menno Parsons' newly acquired Douglas DC-3 'Delaney' - ex Rowan Vos. Brian Emmenis and his Capital Sounds team made sure that the entire airfield was covered with speakers and as always his presentation was informative and entertaining.

CC Pocock was also at his best. First flying a Sling, setting off a 200 metre 'wall of fire' and then literally blowing the place and an old car apart! The crowd cheered Nigel Hopkins when he performed tumbles in his agile MX2. I have never heard a crowd voice its appreciation so much before. This was followed by a very low fly-past by the Beechjet 400 flown by Les Trotter. Altech Netstar provided a display of how effective its stolen vehicle recovery system has become using a helicopter and ground based vehicles. Les Trotter re-appeared this time in a Hawker 800 showing off the business jet's power when flying away from a missed approach. The Eqstra Flying Lions formation team entered the show with its trade mark precision display in the four T6 Harvards. The pilots namely Scully Levin, Arnie Meneghelli, Sean Thackwray and Ellis Levin have been flying together for many years and their close formation flying is always a treat.

Suddenly the airspace was filled with the sound of a Merlin motor leaving many of the crowd in awe, as Menno Parsons displayed his P51 Mustang. African Pilot has given Menno the nickname of 'Peter Pan,' because it seems he will always be that eternal young man. Mike Weingartz followed with a display in Dawie Laas' privately owned Impala military jet trainer. Mike has the most hours of any pilot in the world on the Impala. After numerous requests by Brian Emmenis for some individual to remove a vehicle that was 'blocking an entrance' - failed, Alistair Brown effortlessly lifted the offending vehicle with the Bell Huey and dropped the vehicle in a field opposite the runway. As the car was dropped the crowd cheered madly. All pre-arranged, but nevertheless jolly good fun!

Sporting its new sponsor's livery the Torre team of four Pitts Specials performed a stunning display of close formation aerobatics then young Jason Beamish expertly displayed an immaculate Boeing Stearman from the Menno Parsons squadron. Four skydivers exited Little Annie the 'Just love Mission' Russian Antonov AN2. Everybody was thrilled when the skydivers landed right in front of the crowd with pinpoint accuracy. Glen Warden flew a most entertaining display in Menno Parsons' Czechoslovakian L39 Albatros and the Goodyear Eagles Pitts Special team displayed tight formation aerobatics to the delight of the crowd.

After a short lunch break the action continued with a flawless display by Team RV consisting of four Vans RV types. Once again Nigel Hopkins took to the air, this time in a Quest Kodiak flanked by two Cirrus SR22s. Kahn de Jager showed off the manoeuvrability of the ICAT Environmental Solutions Robinson 44 showing a simulated game capture exercise. Alistair Brown joined in the display with the Bell Huey painted in Tiger stripes, whilst the contrasting size and sound of these helicopters made for an interesting show. In true American barnstorming style Dannie

Terblanche showed off his Husky like it was a falling leaf and then by running on one wheel and then the other whilst bouncing the little aircraft down the full length of the runway.

A rare display of the two radial aircraft the DC3 and the Antonov AN2 flying together as they faced each other with apposing passes. Derek Hopkins was at the controls of the DC3, whilst Jason Beamish put the AN2 through her paces. This was followed by a display by Nigel Hopkins who kept the crowd entertained with a beautiful aerobatic display in the Boeing Stearman. Andrew Pappas performed an exceptionally short field take-off followed by a 'close in display' of the Bat Hawk LSA. This aircraft type is being widely utilised in southern African wild life parks due to its slow flying ability and quiet engine to combat the scourge of rhino poaching. The Sbach flown by Johnny Smit was next on the programme and he flew a magnificent aerobatic display.

Later in the afternoon the relative quietness of the bushveld was shattered by the sound of the 21 litre Merlin engine powering the P51 Mustang. The P51 performed some machine gun strafing runs followed by bombing runs and finally a vehicle explosion and another 200 metre wall of fire. The burning vehicle presented a perfect opportunity for the Air Tractor, flown by Kahn de Jager, to extinguish the fire. This exciting airshow was wrapped up by Nigel Hopkins flying his MX2 followed by the Goodyear Eagles and Mike Weingartz again flying the Impala. Once again skydivers filled the evening sky, this time exiting the Bell Huey followed by the grand finale, a sunset display by the Eqstra Flying Lions. Brilliant!

**Aircraft displayed at this fantastic airshow were:**

- MX-2 - Nigel Hopkins
- P51 Mustang – Menno Parsons
- Harvards Eqstra Flying Lions
- Scully Levin, Arnie Meneghelli, Sean Thackwray and Ellis Levin
- Goodyear Eagles Pitts Specials
- Dennis Spence, Paul Coetze and Johan von Solms
- Torre Gabriel Pitts Specials
- Scully Levin, Arnie Meneghelli, Sean Thackwray and Ellis Levin
- Bell Huey – Alistair Brown
- ICAT Robinson R44 – Kahn de Jager
- Aviat Husky – Danie Terblanche
- Boeing Stearman – Jason Beamish
- Bantam – Andrew Pappas
- Antonov AN-2 'Little Annie' – Jason Beamish
- Douglas DC-3 – Derek Hopkins
- Cirrus SR-22 – Deon Wentzel and Able Pienaar
- Air Tractor crop sprayer – Kahn de Jager
- Beechjet – Les Trotter
- Hawker 800 – Les Trotter
- Savannah – John Waterson
- Impala Mk1 – Mike Weingartz
- Team RV – four RV type aircraft in formation
- T28 Trojan – Nigel Hopkins
- Skydivers jumped from the Antonov AN-2 as well as the Bell Huey helicopter

Chris Briers was the Air Boss and he worked throughout the day in the control tower with South African ATCs: Riaan Olivier and DJ de Nychen: Botswana ATCs: Chris, McBae and Poppy and Namibian ATCs: Leonhardt Kamari and Norbert Abraham. Congratulations go to the organisers and all the sponsors for a wonderful day in the hot Botswana sun as well for the outstanding hospitality that was afforded to all the visiting pilots and their passengers. ✈



*Air Tractor AT-402 - Fiona Hugo*