

LOWVELD AIRSHOW NELSPRUIT 2015

Big South African flag - Athol Franz



Aero L-29 - Fiona Hugo



CC Pocock's display - Athol Franz



By Athol Franz

After a ten year absence from the airshow circuit the Lowveld airshow was resurrected in 2014. However, this year's airshow was one of the finest airshows ever staged at the Nelspruit local General Aviation airport. As I had been visiting customers at the airfield throughout the day before the airshow I was able to see for myself the huge amount of work that goes into the preparation for a highly successful airshow such as Nelspruit.



Over the 'build-up' period on the Friday, somewhere in the region of 5 000 school children from all over the region were bussed to the airfield. Under the supervision of their teachers and Lowveld Aero Club members as well as Kishugu staff members they were introduced to many aspects of aviation. Friday was also used for various airshow teams to validate their individual displays, whilst they familiarised themselves with the layout of the airfield.

The main sponsor, Kishugu – which is the Swahili word for 'Anthill' – is known world-wide for its successful implementation of the South African Government's initiative of 'Working on Fire,' is based at the airfield, whilst several other sponsors provided financial means to stage an airshow that was delightful as the spectators witnessed some of the most unusual displays on the airshow circuit. All pilots flew their respective displays with passion and absolute safety, whilst the evening display by the Flying Lions was a spectacle to behold and this was followed by a night parachute jump with a huge South African flag that was lit up by a SAPS helicopter using its million candle power 'night sun' light. Once all aircraft were safely on the ground the many spectators that waited until well after dark were treated to a spectacular fireworks display.

This airshow provided excellent entertainment for an action packed day with very few gaps in the programme. Kishugu, as a gesture of good will, opened its offices and balcony, which had a fantastic view of the airfield to its guests, pilots and media. The company also provided liquid refreshments including a tasty lunch for its guests. Together with the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency and Absolute Aviation; Textron agents for Beechcraft aircraft the other main sponsors, the management of this airshow was one of the finest I have ever seen in my 30 years of covering airshows all over South Africa. Parking was provided for spectators, VIPs, disabled people and permit holders; all strictly and efficiently controlled by volunteers. After the airshow the organisers treated their special

guests, participating pilots, media and assistants to a scrumptious sit down dinner in one of the hangars that had been specially prepared for the occasion.

Brian Emmenis and his Capital Sounds team covered the airfield with 'speakers' so that nobody in the audience could miss the entertainment for which Capital Sounds is famous. As always, Brian's commentary is informative, but at the same time the entertainment value he adds to these events provides a unique flavour to any aviation event. Brian's personal knowledge about the display pilots and their aircraft is significant and when his commentary is coupled with that of Leon de Plessis, Charlie Marais and others expert in their appropriate fields, this formula really works. Controlling the airshow on a raised platform was the outstanding team of Johan Heine the CEO of Kishugu and event director, air boss Charlie Marais and air boss Koos Kieck.

Several skydivers opened the airshow by jumping from two high wing Cessnas high above the airfield together with one carrying an unfurled gigantic South African flag. This was followed by a different type of skydiving by the Lowveld Model Aircraft Club when three model skydivers were dropped from a model Cessna aircraft to open their respective parachutes and be radio controlled as they descended for a safe landing on the airfield. The club also displayed a jet powered Typhoon and Yak 54 to the delight of the spectators.

Etienne Oosthuizen and another local pilot displayed two Kit Fox aircraft and this was followed by Andrew Pappas owner of Micro Aviation who displayed his Bat Hawk, South Africa's best-selling Light Sport Aircraft (LSA). The Bat Hawk is used extensively in African game reserves as an anti-poaching surveillance eye in the sky aircraft. The next display was that of three Fox Bat LSA



Air Bosses - Athol Franz



Jayson Beamish in his Extra - Christine Brits

aircraft followed by an Alouette II helicopter that was displayed by Johan Joubert and an Aerospatiale Gazelle was displayed by Danie Terblanche. My! These 60 year old French choppers can still perform magnificently. Team Kitty Hawk displayed four Vans RVs led by Pierre Gouws and flanked by Nigel Hopkins MX-2 and Jason Beamish Extra 300. Danie Terblanche another local, ex SAAF pilot and a regular airshow performer flew his Husky in an 'old man steals a plane' crazy flying display. Later Danie also flew the nimble Robinson R22 in an incredible display of helicopter flying.

Riaan Prinsloo a resident of Middelburg and regular competitor in aerobatic competitions as well as a part time Working on Fire spotter plane pilot, flew his Yak 18T in a display of graceful aerobatics. The Impala Mk1 was expertly flown, as always by Mike Weingartz, followed by the L-39 Albatros flown by Captain Pierre Gouws and the L-29 Delphin flown by ex-SAAF pilot Koos Kieck. These two immaculate aircraft are owned by Middleburg businessman Richard Lovitt. Airlink's Avro 85 four engine jet airliner operating from Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA) provided that 'big airliner' display.

Formation aerobatics of the four Torre / Gabriel Pitts Specials provided two precision displays through the day. World renowned bush pilot CC Pocock flew his Bush Air 1 Cessna 172 with grace and style ending his display with a mighty 'wall of fire' as he set off the pyro-techniques from a radio link in his

aircraft whilst flying right next to the huge explosion. Many Bell Huey helicopters and AT 802 Air Tractor water bombers are based at Nelspruit during the winter fire season and these aircraft formed a significant part of the airshow display.

The Silver Falcons, ambassadors of the South African Air Force (SAAF) together with a single Hawk painted in the colours of the South African flag provided two formation displays. After the break, the Hawk piloted by Major P.J. 'Paragon' Norden continued with his solo display, which when completed was followed by a display of formation aerobatics by the Silver Falcons flying the Pilatus PC-7 Mk-2. Once again Nigel Hopkins thrilled the spectators with his race against a Porsche; naturally the MX-2 won the race.

Congratulations to Johan Heine - Kishugu CEO and airshow flight director for his personal leadership of a superb team of dedicated men and women who made this airshow an overall success. Both air bosses, Charlie Marais and Koos Kieck were very thorough in the manner in which they briefed the participating pilots and managed the show. I was told that in all somewhere in the region of 7 000 people passed through the gates and when this figure is added to the 5 000 school children from the previous day, this indicates a significant success for South African aviation. There is no doubt that with a quality performance of this style the Lowveld airshow has set a significant standard for all future airshows. 🇿🇦



Airlink's RJ85 - Christine Brits