

Paramount sponsored

SAAF MUSEUM AIRSHOW

at AFB Swartkop - Saturday 9 May

By Athol Franz

Good weather and an excellent pre-publicity campaign resulted in significant spectator numbers. This year, the Museum's management had moved the crowd line much further forward towards the runway, effectively correcting the runway offset that has been a problem in previous years.

As one of the main sponsors, Mango Airlines held an aviation careers' day mainly for historically disadvantaged children and arrangements were made to bus in about 5 000 school children together with their teachers throughout the Friday. I fully endorse all attempts to provide aviation education and to see so many well-disciplined children in their school uniforms taking in the various displays including careers in the SANDF.

Although the airshow was well managed, it was a great pity that the Department of Public Works had not completed the various upgrades that have plagued this air base over the past year. The nett result was that Air Force Base (AFB) Swartkop was in a considerable mess, which was not the fault of the Air Force Museum. Unlike in previous years, I was impressed with the overall cleanliness of the base due to the appointment of WastePlan a waste removal company that utilised many trained people to empty bins and remove waste throughout the day.

This year the camera company Nikon set up a large area for all airshow photographers no matter what camera systems they operated, whilst at the same time photographers enjoyed refreshments and hospitality of Nikon. Another area for photographers was set up with raked seating in the recessed area directly in front of the announcers stand and show boss stand at show centre. The Museum's management is to be congratulated for accommodating those of us who work at airshows so as to ensure excellent publicity for future events.

As has been a tradition the show was opened by many powered parachutes arriving overhead from the west as well as some gyrocopters. This was followed by the usual emergency services' parade with water firefighting cannons, police vehicles and ambulances. Then the SAAF Cessna Caravan dropped parachutists to start the airshow.

The show itself this year was a real 'show stopper' with the inclusion of several civilian displays, including the Team RV squadron of five RV types led by SAA Captain Pierre Gouws. We also witnessed the final commercial flight of Springbok Flying Safaris' famous DC-3, which Captain Flippie Vermeulen has sold to a German businessman collector of fine old aircraft types. The Paramount





Harvard with the wall of fire - Irene McCullagh

Bell Huey - Athol Franz



Oryx - Garth Calitz



C130 releasing flares - Christine Brits

Impala Mk.I - Marc Franz



AHRLAC - Athol Franz

Group's anti rhino poaching demonstration was a superb example of 'in your face' activity as the operatives released dogs from the Gazelle helicopter to 'capture' the poachers. What would an airshow be without Menno Parsons flying his Mustang Sally, Bell Huey and his L39 and T28 Trojan flown by display pilots? Then there was the magnificent Mango airline Boeing 737-800 flown by legendary retired SAA Captains Scully Levin and Rodney Chinn together with the Silver Falcons and then a solo display. The four Eqstra Flying Lions Harvards, Gabriel Pitts Specials and Goodyear Eagles all slotted in excellent formation aerobatics. The fast and furious aerobatics had the crowd on its feet when Neville Ferreira flew his Slick 540 and again when Nigel Hopkins displayed his MX-2 with dramatic aerobatic sequences.

The SAAF Museum was well represented with most of the serviceable aircraft providing superb displays that at times were joined by vintage types such as Jeff Earle's Tiger Moth as well as two de Havilland Chipmunks and a Boeing Stearman. A good display by eight T6 Harvards in two formations as well the Tora Tora bombing runs with explosives on the ground was most entertaining. When the Harvards shut down right in front of the announcers' stand the military

set off the biggest wall of fire that I have ever seen in South Africa – more than 65 metres long! An interesting formation consisting of the Impala, DH Vampire and a Hawk was excellently flown by the three display pilots. The Museum's helicopter section was also well represented by the Alouette II, Alouette III and Puma helicopters flying in formations and as solo slots.

The SAAF brought out its 'big guns' flying the Hawk, Oryx helicopter, C130 Hercules and the ultimate 'show stopper' the Gripen displayed by the Officer Commanding 2 Squadron at Mkhado - Musa 'Midnight' Mbkonta. We watched a brilliant low level display by the venerable C130 Hercules, as she despatched many paratroopers on static lines off the rear ramp of the aircraft so that the air was filled with parachutes. Later the Hercules overflew the crowd very low from the rear (west) and on pulling up deployed counter measure flares that lit up the sky. The grand finale of this unique airshow was the display at and just after sunset of the Gripen when she also deployed flares on her climbing full afterburner reach for the stars. Immediately after the last flare the military ground engineers set off another 65 metre wall of fire that was delayed from the left and right so as to culminate in a tower of flames in the centre.

Gripen taking off at dusk - Irene McCullagh



APLA class of 76 at the handover of the Cessna C150 - Charles Hugo



Hawk, Impala and Vampire in formation - Garth Calitz



Disabled youth with a simulator - Fiona Hugo

SOME OBSERVATIONS

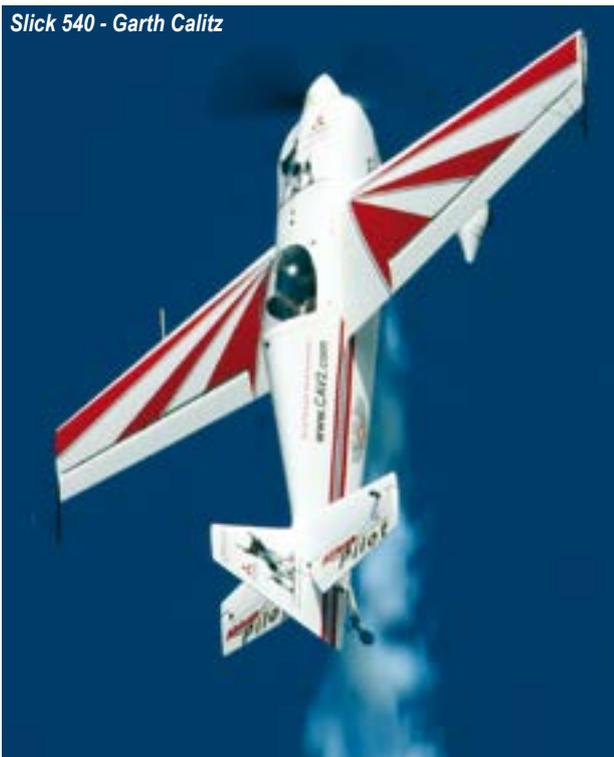
Although the quality of sound was good at the main show areas, it was totally inadequate towards the south side of and the rear of the spectator area. There were plenty of speaker frames that had been set up, but many of them had no speakers installed. Had there been an emergency this would have been a serious factor because there was no way the announcer could have reached at least 50% of the crowd. Secondly although I don't have anything against Eon de Vos who was the announcer on the day, there was a serious lack of preparation with very little detail on many of the air displays. I feel that under the circumstances Eon did a very good job by also utilising several squadron and civilian speakers, but the show lacked the sheer enthusiasm that Brian Emmenis and his team bring to events of this nature.

Like African Pilot, many exhibitors and spectators were kept waiting outside the various gates for a very long time in the early morning due to what I understand was a South African Police Service (SAPS) sweep for 'explosives.' My question is: "why could this not have been done much earlier in the morning at about 04h30 to 05h30 so that everyone could have been set up by the time the gates were opened to spectators at 07h00?"

There were not any airshow programmes this year, which I feel is not only a serious oversight, but a wasted opportunity to make some extra money for the SAAF Museum. In addition, there was a serious shortage of adequate toilet facilities within the main public area, with very long queues developing to use the toilets that were available. Having said this, the quality of the toilets was excellent and the attention to cleanliness detail was good. Although at the time of writing I have not received the actual attendance figures it appeared that the crowd was smaller this year, but this could have also been as a result of moving the spectator line forward, which I mentioned earlier.

Overall the Paramount SAAF Museum Swartkop airshow was a wonderful spectacle and I am sure that those spectators who stayed to the very end will all agree that the grand finale was truly a spectacular South African achievement. ✈

Slick 540 - Garth Calitz



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