



Zandspruit Airshow

Saturday 13 June - what a cracker!

By Athol Franz

One way to disturb the serenity of the bushveld is to stage an airshow and just as two years ago, Martin den Dunnen and his Zandspruit team did exactly that on 13 June! True to all promises made, this was one of those bushveld airshows that was not to be missed under any circumstances.



T28 Trojan landing over Brian Emmenis - Athol Franz



Harley Davidson bikes - Fiona Hugo

Nestling in sight of the majestic Drakensberg Mountains, Zandspruit Bush and Aero Estate, just outside the Bushveld town of Hoedspruit, is a delightful place to live where one can get away from the everyday challenges of suburban life in the cities. This tranquil spot has been purpose designed to accommodate nature lovers to live in luxury amongst the many game species that abound on the Estate. Then just to add an incredible option Zandspruit boasts a 1000 metre paved runway with abundant hangar space along the side of the runway as well as within the general hangar area near the river. Owners can choose stands with a bush view and have their hangars back onto the side of the runway at the bottom end of their stands or they can purchase a stand well away from the runway and simply utilise one of the general hangars available on the Estate.

When the first ever Zandspruit airshow was staged it was set alongside the runway, which in the opinion of certain safety recommendations was not a good idea. For this reason the entire airshow was turned through an angle of 90 degrees to follow the dry river bed as the flight line for the display pilots. Most of the participating display aircraft still used the runway although the

threshold had been offset by about 300 metres. The SAAF's Silver Falcons and other jets operated from the Hoedspruit Air Force base nearby, whilst the single SAAF Agusta 109 helicopter operated from Zandspruit. Needless to say that despite the logistical challenges, the airshow ran on time and there were very few gaps throughout the day. The lunch hour was devoted to the Lowveld Aero Modellers and a bunch of Harley Davidson bikes that entertained the crown of about 3000 people.

To say that the organisation was superb is an understatement! From catering for VIP guests to the marshalling of spectators' vehicles, outstanding safety equipment with two sets of fire engines; one positioned between the hangars near the centre of the runway with a fully trained ambulance emergency crew, whilst the other was stationed behind the public viewing area for quick access to the river bed if required. A scaffolding tower had been built specifically to accommodate the two air bosses Charlie Marais and Chris Briers as well as the ATC team from Lanseria comprising of Shaun Mollentze and Donovan Hoey. Brian Emmenis and his Capital Sounds' team had the entire public area covered with



Silver Falcons - Athol Franz



Air Tractor AT-802 - Charlie Hugo



Part of the crowd - Christine Brits



L-29 - Charlie Hugo



Kitty Hawks - Fiona Hugo



Martin den Dunnen (seated) celebrates his birthday in style - Athol Franz



speakers so that ongoing commentary from not only Brian and his right hand man Leon du Plessis, but also from display team commentators kept the spectators informed about what was happening throughout the day.

The airshow programme started off with Corne Vorster jumping out of a Bell 407 helicopter with a very large South African flag attached to him. The airshow itself was punctuated with unique and very interesting displays. One of these which must be a world first was the formation of a Boeing Stearman flown by Nigel Hopkins with a L-39 Albatros flown by Pierre Gouws. The Silver Falcons provided two full formation displays in the morning and again in the afternoon. This airshow featured three T28 Trojans in formation with Menno Parsons flying his beloved Mustang Sally P51D in the 'slot position.' Menno brought along not only his Mustang, but a T28 Trojan, a Boeing Stearman, a L-39 and a Huey and Bell 407 helicopter. John Sayers brought his T-28 Trojan and immaculate Waco. There were the four Eqstra Flying Lions' Harvards, four Tore/Gabriel Pitts Specials, three Goodyear Pitts Specials and several individually owned aircraft such as the Kitty Hawks RV team which put on a tremendous show and a Robinson R44 helicopter superbly displayed by Kahn de Jager. It was certainly a full programme. To see three training jets: a L-29, an Impala Mk-1 and a L-39 fly in formation against this magnificent backdrop was a sight to behold. Working on Fire had a chance to show off a Bell Huey as well as a Turbo Thrush with staged water bombing along the edge of the display area.

Late in the afternoon and for the first time we watched Andrew Pappas and Bobby Rowe display two identically camouflaged Bathawks in formation as well as to show how silently they can operate over game reserve territory specifically for use in anti-rhino poaching operations. It was also a delight to see Johnny Smith fly his Sbach in this beautiful part of the world. As always, Nigel Hopkins flying his MX-2 had the spectators on their feet to cheer his tumbles high above the bushveld in what so often to the untrained eye looks like a hopeless loss of control of this high performance aerobatics' machine.

The airshow came to its conclusion, but not without another superb performance of the four Eqstra Flying Lions' T6 Harvards as their 'night show' with lights shining backwards into the smoke from the diesel pumped over the hot exhausts of these graceful machines. Once everyone was safely on the ground, the party at the airfield started and what an event this was with pilots swapping stories of their experiences and events of the day.

Martin den Dunnen, developer of Zandspruit wishes to thank the various sponsors that made this incredible airshow possible - in no particular order: Master Power Technologies, Pick 'n Pay, Spar, SATIB Insurance Brokers, ReMax Properties, Sable Tours, ME Graphics, Talisman, Leopards Electrical, Vector Fencing and BUCO. On behalf of African Pilot I would like to thank the Zandspruit team for its excellent hospitality and a fabulous airshow. It is an airshow such as this that keeps General Aviation alive in South Africa. In his wrap-up talk, Martin said that Zandspruit would skip a year in 2016, but that the airshow would be back on the aviation calendar in 2017. I can hardly wait! ✈️



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In 2013 Zandspruit was the proud Runner-up of the best Airshow in South Africa. This year, on the 13th of June, we are going for Gold.

Keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates. 

