

CLOUD DANCING OVER WINDHOEK

Mark Mansfield reports from Namibia

AN ACCIDENT-free air show; a good crowd attendance and a smooth-running programme. These were the three basic requirements stipulated by Reinhard Gärtner, president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Namibia, when the plans for the country's first international air show were being formulated.

And they were realised in Windhoek on August 1 when the Trustco Namibian International Air Show was held at the Hosea Kutako International Airport, and which also achieved international acclaim as the proverbial "cherry on the top".

With over 15000 visitors, and around 29 aircraft actively taking part, the Trustco Namibian International Air Show has gone down in the record books as one of the best seen on the continent this year.

So what made the show so good? Was it the flying? Well yes, certainly. Performing there were the best of the South African air show pilots. It seemed as if they flying with a renewed sense of national pride. They included the likes of Menno Parson, Chris Briers, Nigel Hopkins, Jason Beamish, Mark Hill (who tirelessly flew children all day Friday and Saturday in his Antonov An-2 known as Little Annie Hill), Ellis Levin, Scully Levin, Glen Warden, Dennis Spence, Deon Wentzel to name but a few.

Or was it the commitment of AOPA Namibia members? Of course, yes. If it were not for them and main sponsor, Trustco, there would have been no show.

Was it the brilliant and well run organisation with all the relocating, accommodating, cross-border arrangements that can be a logistical nightmare, that was so well handled by AOPA member Philip Ellis and his son Shaun Ellis, as well as all the other AOPA members behind the scenes? The answer is again is a resounding yes.

Was it the fact that the President of Namibia actually attended the show and the fact that there was full government cooperation (no narrow-minded politics)?

Then there was the high class commentary by well-known Brian Emmenis and the Capital Sounds team that made a major contribution to the show?

Was it the amazing aircraft in the actual show that made it such a success, aircraft such as; three GoodYear Eagles Pitts Special team; four Eqstra Flying Lions Harvards; the L39 Albatros; an MX2; a Cirrus; an SAA Airbus A320; the Thunder City Blackburn S2B Buccaneer, and Hawker Hunter; two Chengdu F-7NMs from the Namibian Air Force (Chinese built Mig21s), as well as two Hongdu K8s; the Namibian Police Force's Bell UH1 Huey, Bell 222, Airbus Helicopters, H145, H125 (previously designated the EC145 and AS350 B3E respectively); three Aero Commanders, a Trojan T28, a Mustang P51, a Cessna Grand Caravan Supervan 900, and a Nanchung CJ6. All these, of course, added to the success of the show.

And do not forget the International Airport and its hard-working staff who continued handling the daily scheduled flights in between the air show, which added extra excitement for the crowd.

It is interesting to note, that the last time a Buccaneer flew in Namibian air space, was in 1988 (before it received its independence from South Africa in 1990) when these were still operated by 24 Squadron, in South African Air Force (SAAF).

This and so much more made the Trustco Namibian International Air Show a resounding and world-class successful event.

So what lessons can neighbouring South Africa learn from this? For a start, let air shows be run by pilots. Drop all the bureaucratic red tape and egos that go along with it.

It also proved that all agencies and organisations involved in aviation could work together in a cohesive manner and pull off amazing events – as long as attitudes are right and willingness is one of the common denominators.

An international air show would not be the same if there were no major breaking news announcements, and the Trustco Namibian International Air Show was no exception. Breaking news directly from the show was the announcement by the Absolute Aviation Group, based at Lanseria International Airport, South Africa, that it had concluded the deal to acquire one hundred percent of Lanseria International based Comair Sales and Services, (all the non-airline based entities).

Absolute Aviation has been the Authorised Representative for Beechcraft in Africa since 2011 and the acquisition now adds representation for Cessna to the Absolute Aviation portfolio. See Page XXX for full report.

This was Namibia's first air show in 20 years. The first was at Windhoek's Eros Airport but was shrouded in controversy as Brian Emmenis, CEO of Capital Sounds, recalls that day very clearly. He

explained that as part of the SAAF's 75th celebrations that year, it was decided that military aircraft from South Africa would take part in the Windhoek air show.

The aircraft were two Mirage F1AZs from 1 Squadron, a Hercules C130 from 28 Squadron and an Oryx helicopter from 30 Squadron, and these were based at Windhoek's international airport for the period.

Emmenis recalls that on the Thursday evening leading up to the air show, a high-ranking government official was returning to Namibia and was very alarmed to see SAAF aircraft on the apron. The following morning, orders were given to round up and hold all South African military personnel.

After a very tense few hours, and the intervention from South Africa's then president, Nelson Mandela, the situation was sorted out and the show continued on the Saturday without further incident. Emmenis was the official broadcaster at that show as well.