

The Comets' Tale

*The Official
Newsletter of the*



November 2008

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The Comets' Tale is the official newsletter and record of the Ventura County Comets, AMA Chartered Club #173 and is published monthly at the Comets' Tale Plaza, somewhere in Ventura.

Editorial contributions are welcome.

**Next Meeting: Thursday, 20 November, 2008,
7:30 PM at the Oak View Community Center**



**Coming
Up!**

21, 22, 23 November
Club Members Only
Float Fly at Lake Casitas

Thursday, 18 December
Annual Comets
Christmas Potluck

**1st Sunday of Each
Month**
Open House at Santa Paula
Airport

Root's Rambling

This year George Boston attended the Reno Air Races. He is a great photographer and took a lot of pictures. He loaned two CD's to some of us (about 350 pictures). After looking at them I decided to go thru my racing file, which leads me to the subject of this months offering. The Reno Air Races, almost from the beginning, have included an air show as well as the races. The following pictures were taken by George. Air show pictures 1, 2, and 3 show the Thunderbirds and the Air Force old and new. Seeing the airplanes up close in the pits is an important part of the show. Picture 4 shows a Sea Fury. Typical unlimited racers are shown in picture 5 (P-51) and 6





(Sea Fury) and an unusual but not very competitive Tigercat is shown in picture 7. Picture 8 shows two planes in the Sport Biplane class. This event has been legislated back to sport air-

2



3



4

planes after a period of development into very specialized racing biplanes in the 80's and 90's.

The Reno Air Races were originally initiated

by Bill Stead, a successful cattle rancher, member of the Unlimited Hydroplane Racing Hall of Fame, and the owner of a white Grumman Bearcat which he flew off dirt roads on his vast ranch northeast of Reno. The last Cleveland National Air Race ended with a terrible accident in 1949. Midget races continued until 1960 but drew little public interest. In 1962



5



6

Stead started working on the problem. He used all his business skills to convince a tough gambling town that this sport could do wonders for business. He spent two years convincing the Reno



7

casinos and hotels, the state government, and finally ABC-TV "Wide World of Sports" and the National Air Races were reborn in September of 1964.

These early events were held at Bill's Sky Ranch which was more grazing land than airport, lacking hard-surface runways, hangars, and ramps.



However, it was out in the wilds with plenty of room for a long course for the Mustangs and Bearcats he had named the Unlimited class. He also included a transcontinental race from St. Petersburg, Fl. (2,260 mi.), the midget racers (190 cu. in. engines), a class for the home-built biplanes, and a Stock Plane class for the women pilots (who weren't allowed to race around pylons with the men until the 70's). The transcontinental race was won by a stock P-51D at 320 mph. All of the unlimited racers were pretty much



operated out of the Reno commercial airport because of the short runway at the ranch (the unlimited races were started in the air). The unlimited winner was



was Greenmyer in a modified F8F2 Bearcat at 375 mph. Bill Falck pushed his midget class Rivets 205 mph in the time trials, but the final event was won by Little Gem at 202 mph. The Sport Biplane class was won by a Mong Sport at 153 mph. There were only 3 entrants in the Stock Plane class so this was the last year for this class.

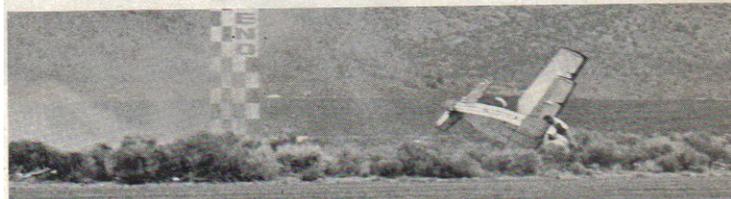




W. B. "Win" Kinner had trouble coping with severe cross winds on takeoff for the start of Friday's heat race for biplanes. The wind forced Kinner's racer into the sagebrush . . .



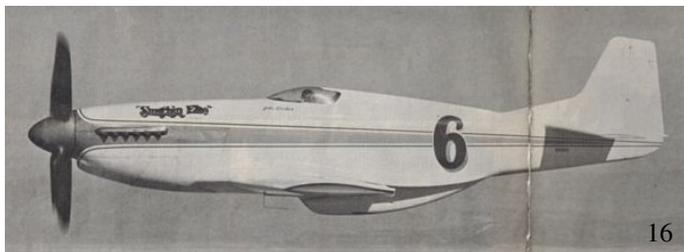
. . . and the gear snagged and the racer nosed completely over . . .



. . . smashing the vertical and destroying the left wing . . .



. . . however, Kinner emerged from the mangled airframe unurt. (J. Larsen)



In the spring of 1966 Bill Stead died in a midget racer crash during a practice flight. The organization was so solid that it was able to carry on without him. The site was moved to the recently deactivated Stead Air Force Base (named after Bill's late brother) where it is held to this day. In 1966 Bill Falck won the midget finals at 193 mph. The unlimited race was won by Greenmyer at 396 mph. The transcontinental race was won by a Hawker Sea Fury, the first of its type to race, at 418 mph.



I have an article on the 1967 fourth annual Reno air races. Picture 9 shows the 190 cu. in. midget racers (they went to 200 cu. in. in 1968). Top winner was Bill Falck in his famous Rivets (#92). Picture 10 shows one of the unlimited racers (P-39), and 11 shows Greenamyers winning Bearcat.

I attended the races again in 1974 on the way to my new job at Northrop. That year Lyle Shelton flew his Wright R-3350-

powered Bearcat to a time trials record of 432 mph, but bowed to Ken Burnstine at 382 mph in the finals when all the hot ones dropped out. By this time there were a lot of specially designed airplanes in the Sport Biplane class. Sid White and his all-metal Sun-dancer won the finals at 195 mph. Ray Cote won the midget class now called Formula One in Shoestring at 235 mph. By this time the more or less stock AT-6 class was included with Pat Palmer (a Boeing engineer) winning at 211 mph.



Pictures from the 1976 races include the specially designed biplane in picture 12 and the more traditional Knight Twister biplane in 13. The Knight Twister was a small biplane designed in the 30's and raced successfully for years. The effect of a crosswind during the takeoff of a biplane heat is shown in picture 14. A highly modified P-51 with a huge Rolls-Royce Griffon engine is shown in 15 and the unlimited winning modified P-51 is shown in 16. Picture 17 shows a typical AT-6 race. Pat Palmer won again this year.



The last year I have info on is 1987 when the unlimited time trials speed was 467 mph for the P-51 Strega and a custom built airplane, Tsunami, was second at 465 mph. In the finals Strega won at 453 mph. The AT-6 class was won at 226 mph. Formula One racers are shown in picture 18 (Sump'n Else), 19 (Rivets), 20 (my favorite, with elliptical wing, Stinger). One of the big Sea Fury's is shown

in 21.

The year 2008 represented the 45th running of the National Air Races, quite an achievement for an event started by a business man who loved big fast airplanes. Everyone should attend these races at least once. They are amazing.

I may discuss pictures of other Reno racers in my file including some of the latest airplanes in a later Ramble if members are interested.

Bob Root

October 2008 Minutes

The Comet meeting was called to order by President Mike Ambarian on October 16, at 7:30 pm, at the Oak View Community Center.

The September minutes were approved. We had no guests and no new members.

Treasurer's Report: We have 111 members and finances are in very good shape. The report was approved.

Field Marshal/Safety Officer: Steve Billings had nothing to report.

Park Liaison: Kenny Marsh reported that the inspection of floats, for the upcoming Float Fly, was still a requirement for all participating planes. Planes are required to have a sticker, showing it was inspected, in order to be launched.

Old Business: Volunteers for all jobs are ready of the Float Fly. The Contest Director (CD), Ron Scott reminded everybody of safety issues. It was voted that no buddy boxes would be allowed on Saturday or Sunday. The Safety Officer, Steve Billings, is in charge of the plane launchers. Dale Nash informed the Club that he had purchased orange vests for all launchers, so they could easily be identified as launchers. The vests can be checked out from Marilyn Nash and Sandy Brown at the raffle table. If vests are not returned there will be a \$10 fee.

New Business: AMA requested our participation in charity flying functions. Members voted to let it slide.

Pres. Mike Ambarian reported on bids obtained for applying a slurry coating on the field. One bid came in at \$1,600 for 7,000 square feet. Another company was a no bid. The Board approved a bid of \$4,080. The Club members will power wash the field prior to the paving company applying a spec slurry to fill in cracks. After drying, the final slurry will be applied.

T.J. Moran reported on the meeting he attended of the Bureau of Land and Recreation. The lease for Lake Casitas area is due for its 50 year renewal and many laws have changed since the lease was signed 50 years ago. He advised Club members the Bureau is collecting comments, to their proposed plan for Lake Casitas land use, until the end of the month.

Steve Billings informed the Club about a new Rocket Racing league that races a three-dimensional "Raceway in the Sky". The track will be approximately one mile wide, two miles long and one mile high. The raceway will vary in shape and complexity, and consist of gates and obstacles created through a sophisticated avionics package that melds the real world with the virtual, presenting to the pilots and spectators a real-time depiction of the race course containing the virtual raceway, navigation metrics and safety aids. Check it out at rocketracingleague.com.

Model of the Month: Ron Scott brought his Eagle electric plane made out of PVC foam. The plane is realistic enough to fool the hawks that circled it when he flew it earlier in the day. The plane uses a 200 milliamp battery.

The raffle was held and the meeting was adjourned at 8:00.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandy Brown



Comets Float Fly, 18 & 19 October 2008



Ron Scott



Ron Scott



10-18-2008

Ron Scott



TJ Moran



TJ Moran



Last month's Whatzit airplane is a Dart Kitten, built by Dart Aircraft Ltd. Of England in 1937. The engine is a 36 hp J.A.P. J.99 flat twin. Cruises at 83 mph and tops out at 95. It's all wood and I believe this is the only one built.

This month we have a biplane hanging in the Udvar-Hazy restoration facility, part of the Smithsonian Institute. Cap'n Leo Jaskoski on Avondale AZ submitted this airplane and he didn't tell me what it is either. Do you know? -jerry

