

# No Room for *PRIMA DONNAS*



**T**he harried airshow director: "Can you believe that guy!" (Named deleted to protect the guilty.) "One more comment like that and I'll..."

The airshow was a great way to spend a weekend! Top line performers filled a solid two hours of fast-paced and exciting action. From the opening flag jump to the closing act, the airboss kept everything tight with no gaps. The crowd was never bored, and as the last of the smoke drifted away, the spectators left completely entertained and, more importantly, wanting more.

The only dark spot was high-maintenance performers.

Back in my halcyon days when I was a bizjet manufacturer's demo pilot and tech rep, I had the privilege of flying many celebrities. Some, like Johnny Cash, would help you load the baggage into the airplane. Others, who shall go nameless, made the average US jet team pale by comparison in their demands for special treatment.

I have sat in the cabin picking out all the licorice jelly beans to satisfy one rock group's requirement for a certain brand of gourmet jelly beans, "without the black ones." Another "star" demanded that only organic fruit be served on board. Have you ever tried to find certified organic fruit in a small town? My thoughts, never verbalized, were, "If you are such a big star, why are you playing this Podunk venue?"

So, yes, I know highly demanding performers.

I've seen too many airshow performers adopting this same Prima Donna (PD) attitude in their dealing with the shows.

I remember many years ago the Thunderbirds used to "require" matching Ford Thunderbirds for the team's pilots. "Require" is in quotation marks because it was not an official requirement, just so strongly implied the shows assumed it was required.

Not too long ago, the Blue Angels' advance man required all the team's rental cars be moved into the shade of a hanger so the cars "could be cool when the team arrived." He later called the show's director, asking for more towels to be delivered to the local gym for the team.

Some civilian performers are jumping on the PD band wagon. Phrases like "our contract requires" do not go over well with stressed airshow volunteers. Demanding perfection from a volunteer organization is not only self-serving, it is self-limiting.


A jet team gets away with their demands simply by the power of their gate draw and the fear that if a show stands up to the excess demands, they will be black-balled from any future consideration as a show site.

A civilian performer has no such protection. The show simply does not hire the high-maintenance performer again and the performer is left to wonder why, why, why?

For a sponsored performer, this negative reaction spills over to his sponsor's product. I heard one show manager say, "After what I've gone through, I'd never buy another (fill in the blank) even if it was free!"

What I'm saying here is that airshow professionals need to remember we are service providers and our direct customer is the show. Sure, life on the road is hard and living out of a flight bag is not the Ritz, but we have selected this life-style and we need to keep our frustrations to ourselves. Bringing up every minor infraction and demanding immediate remedies does not make friends. So just get over it.

Almost every event is doing the best they can with the available assets. It is our duty to be part of the solution, never part of the problem.

Acting like a PD should remain the special license of the jet teams. 

*If you're such a big star, why are you playing this Podunk venue?*