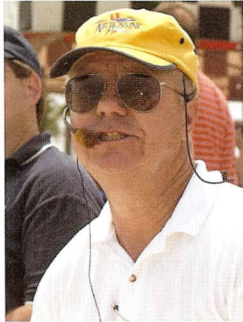




Web Talk



The web is alive with talk of airshows! The past months have seen the launch of several new websites devoted to airshows, filling the void left when the ICAS message boards were shut down.

This magazine is leading one of the efforts with www.airshowmag.com, but the most ambitious to date has been Ed Shipley and company's www.airshowbuzz.com. I was glad to see my old ICAS buddy, Deb Mitchell, as one of the driving forces behind the airshowbuzz site.

As the airshowbuzz site's discussion forums kicked off, Skip Stewart, one of the most forward-thinking and innovative performers today, started a message string asking for comments on Jeff and my columns in the last issue of WAN about the length and admission cost of airshows. The discussion has been lively, open, honest, and passionate; one of the best discussions about the continuing evolution of airshows I have seen.

On both the forum and in side conversations, several things have become apparent to me. The first is the genuine passion for airshows among the fan base. This is a good thing. The second is the number of airshow people in denial about problems within the airshow industry. That is a bad thing because complacency will destroy even the greatest enterprises – example Ford and GM.

Allow me to quote one of the more knowledgeable and articulate forum participants, "Tom:"

"A few of the early responders said that they don't see anything horribly wrong with the airshow industry. I guess that depends on your perspective! If you're Kim Curry at Springfield Air Rendezvous, there's definitely something wrong. If you're another event organizer trying to figure out how to get enough people to your show this year to pay the bills, there's definitely something wrong. If you're an airshow fan, none of the problems that the industry is facing may be obvious...until your

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show goes out of business, or the Navy decides to get out of the airshow business entirely, or some other catastrophe strikes the business side of the airshow business."

Tom continues by identifying two major problems that I also see and, by implication, how to solve them:

"Perhaps the most interesting thing about this thread so far is the question of who should run ICAS. From my perspective, there's no question: the airshows run the airshow business. But the performers – including the military performers – are such larger-than-life characters that they have convinced the show producers that the performers run the business. This does need to change for the industry to move forward, but it'll take time and leadership with the courage to stand up to the big bad pilots and tell them the business realities of the airshow business. The pilots are sellers and the airshow organizers are the buyers. That should give the shows all the power.

"Meanwhile, the business is not subject to the natural tendencies that drive other businesses. With just a few exceptions, airshows aren't driven by the desire to make money – they are driven by an interest in putting on airshows. That confuses things. Many performers also don't feel compelled to make money. They just want to fly their Pitts or their Extra or their P-51 at an airshow and are actually willing to take a loss so long as the IRS doesn't step in and say that the loss has become too big or gone on for too long. That confuses things, too. So we end up with mediocre talent that will fly for next to nothing. We end up with event organizers who would rather have 10,000 fans at \$5 than 4,999 fans at \$10."

Thanks Tom.

Skip Stewart, in referring to the airshowbuzz forum string said he "does not have a dog in this fight." Skip, you are wrong. We all are combatants in this effort to improve and preserve the airshow industry.

The internet is alive with the sound of airshows and if you have an interest in this wonderful business you should be a part of this interchange.

