

Showcase

Puerto Rico Air Extravaganza: a Grunt's Perspective

By Deb Seagle

Traveling with and providing support to a full-time air show performer is a constant source of excitement, sweat, exhilaration and – occasionally – mayhem. Early this spring, we had an episode in our continuing adventure that provides a glimpse into everything that makes it wonderful to be a part of the air show community.

Immediately following Sun n' Fun in Lakeland, Florida, Greg Poe and his support team of Dax Wanless, Bill "Big B" Beardlsey and myself loaded up the Fagen MX-2 and A-36 Bonanza and headed to the Caribbean for the Puerto Rico Air Extravaganza.

After a detour for some scuba diving in the Turks and Caicos



and a fruit-related misunderstanding at Puerto Rican customs that almost landed me in jail, we were greeted by Louis Alvarez, one of the three individuals to launch this new show. Louis would serve as our translator and escort to a school for disadvantaged and handicapped children. Using videos

and photos of air shows and airplanes, Greg offered his perspective on how important it is to work hard and pursue your dreams ... a message that resonated with this particular audience. After his presentation, the students asked Greg questions about air shows and flying for nearly a half hour.

The air show itself – the reason for our trip to Puerto Rico – lived up to its name as the Puerto Rico Air Extravaganza. This inaugural show was organized by Louis Alvarez, Santiago Rubin and Hector Martinez, sponsored by Heineken and air bossed by Ralph Royce. The show took place on Saturday

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and Sunday, April 28 and 29 at Rafael Hernandez International Airport in Aguadilla on the north-west coast of Puerto Rico, about a two hours by car from San Juan.

The show had a robust static line that included a B-52, KC-135, C-130, C-5, F-18, Learjet

45, Gulfstream G-200, C-90, B-200, a Premier jet, and two King Airls. Airboss Royce used the resources available to him – including a number of performers from the continental United States (CONUS) – to develop a full and entertaining show. In addition to Greg Poe, the show

included a number of ICAS members: the Golden Knights Parachute Team, Blue Angel 7 Demo, and Dan Buchanan. The United States Coast Guard Search and Rescue team also captivated the crowd with a fabulous demonstration.

A helicopter from the Puerto Rico Electrical Power Authority provided an interesting departure from “normal” air show performances when it lifted a huge tower, flew it across the flight line and placed in a prepared docking station. The MD530F hovered as workers repelled to the tower and hung the U.S. flag.

It’s funny how air shows work. Organizers conceive a plan. Performers draw the crowds. But it is the fans that make the show! The fans in Puerto Rico were some of the most enthusiastic and animated air show fans I’ve ever seen! I’ve learned that the very best place to be at an air show is in the middle of the crowd that pushes toward the front line. Excitement is contagious and there was an epidemic in Aquadilla this weekend. When Dan looped his glider, the fans oohed and aahhed. The Golden Knights were cheered as they landed. Greg’s famous tsunami maneuver almost created a riot! As each performer entertained, the audience applauded, appreciated and pointed skyward. Almost as if they had practiced, the crowd would shriek and gasp in unison as planes tumbled, looped and pulled skyward.

Comparatively few U.S. air show performers get the opportunity to travel deep into the Caribbean to perform in an air show. Even fewer grunts get to make this kind of trip with the performer to whom they supply support. But I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to take advantage of it. We work in a wonderful, exciting

business. And our trip to Puerto Rico demonstrated that very clearly. There is something about being out of CONUS with other Americans that leads to a feeling of camaraderie. And the enthusiasm with which our group was received by the Puerto Rican air show fans was nothing short of inspiring.

All Eyes on Columbus

It is difficult not to both pity and envy the organizers of this month’s Gathering of Mustangs and Legends (GML2007) at Rick- enbacker Airport in Columbus, Ohio.

On the one hand, Lee Lauderback, Angela West, Bobbi Thompson and the rest of the GML2007 crew are faced with a considerable challenge. They are in the unique position of organizing and conducting a one-time only, world class air show on September 29 and 30. In a business where a show typically evolves and matures over a number of years, the GML2007 team is expected to get it all exactly right in their very first year. From the volunteers and marketing to the ramp space and social events to the sponsorship and flying, they’ll get only one bite at the apple. There will be no GML 2008.

And expectations are high. Indeed, GML2007 is likely the most highly anticipated air show of the 2007 season. The event will include performances by the Thunderbirds, the F-22 Raptor, the F-15 Eagle, the F-16 Viper, the F-4 Phantom, the Red Barons, John Mohr, Michael Goulian, Patty Wagstaff, John Klatt, Ed Hamill, and the Aero- shell Aerobatic Team.

On top of all that, the air show represents only about one-third of the overall event. Because, of course, the real stars of this event are the North American P-51 Mustang and the pilots who flew them during World War II. That means that the