



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Vicky Benzing scribes the sky with smoke in a 1935 Boeing Stearman Saturday during the Watsonville Fly-In & Air Show.

Air Show wows crowd again, at age 50

By CATHY KELLY

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — As the 50th Watsonville Fly-in & Air Show blasted across the weekend skies, organizers Sunday said attendance for the first-ever October show was encouraging.

The event included awe-inspiring air shows plus 100 or so notable planes on display — antique, historic military, experimental, custom-built classic and more. But the show, which benefits local charities and seeks to highlight aviation history, did not stop with aircraft.

It also featured live bands, a popular car show, a monster truck demonstration, children's activities, tethered balloon rides, helicopter and war bird rides, an antique police car match and more.

"We're trying to make it a community event rather than solely an airport event," said Hank Wempe, who chairs the show's board of directors. "I think we're going to have a really good year. We have more corporate sponsorship that we've had the last few years."

Wempe estimated Sunday that 5,000 people attended the show.

Held on Memorial Day weekend for years, organizers recently switched the event to Labor Day weekend before opting for October's clear weather and increased opportunities to book top performers, board member Glen Ceresa said.

Erin and Tom Levi of Watsonville attended for the first time, with their 21-month-old daughter, Brielle, and 4-year-old son, Miles.

"We could see them from home, but to come here and feel the vibration of the engines and see them up-close is really exciting," Erin Levi said. "It's awesome."

Piloting one of those exciting, high-performance planes was Watsonville native Vicky Benzing, an award-winning aerobatic



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Rosalee Ramer powers her monster truck, Wild Flower, over three parked vehicles.

stunt pilot who flew a 1940 Boeing Stearman.

Benzing, of Saratoga, said flying is always a thrill, but that flying in front of an audience demands concentration.

"It's really a thrill for me to be here; I learned to fly here," she said. "It's lovely. It's perfect weather for an open cockpit airplane."

Other performers included the West Coast Ravens Formation Flying Team, Greg Colyer in "Acemaker," a Korean War era Lockheed T-33 Jet, Dr. D's Ole Time Aerobatics, via a clipped-wing 1946 Taylorcraft, and Rich Perkins, an internationally known performer flying a Marchetti SF.260. Also included was a Warbirds Fly-by dedicated to the late Eddie Andreini, a Half Moon Bay



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Nalea Rivera, 5, of Livermore enjoys playing with a balsa wood airplane.



Greg Colyer treats the crowd to a low fly-by in his Acemaker Lockheed T33 fighter jet.

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SHOW

From page A1

pilot who performed in all 49 Watsonville shows.

The Grand Champion of this year's fly-in was Alan Buchner and his 1932 Waco QDC bi-plane. Buchner is from the Central Valley.

For Larry Grant of Aptos, the show was a chance to inspire young people with his displayed 1983 Piper Malibu, a single-engine plane he said holds several world speed records, including for flights from San Francisco to New York and New York to Paris.

Grant, an engineer who owns US Grant Technologies with offices in Watsonville and Beijing, said he learned to fly for business reasons in the 1970s.

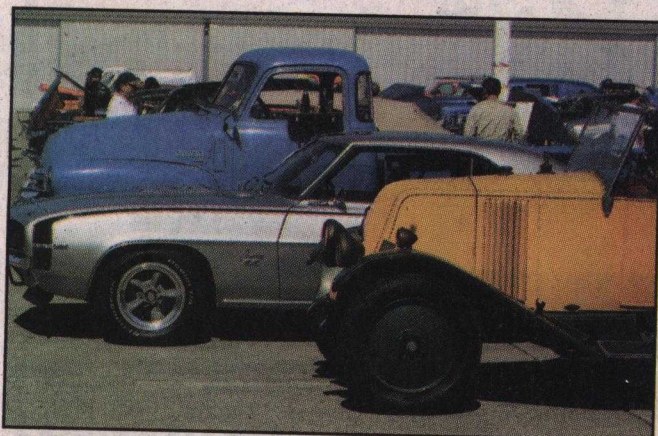
"I really enjoy it and I like sharing this kind of thing with young kids," Grant said, turning to a family who walked up.

"Do you boys want to take a look inside?" he asked, motioning toward the sleek plane with its padded seats for a pilot and five passengers. The boys nodded and grinned, following after him.



Rosalee Ramer, 17, greets the crowd following her monster truck performance.

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A 1923 Renault (right), owned by John Burgess, is part of a classic car show at the event.

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