

Whole lot of smoke, whole lot of noise

Annual Fly-In keeps eyes turned skyward

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — First one parachutist jumped, falling, then drifting down to a haze of yellow smoke marking the landing spot on the ground.

The audience at the 27th annual Watsonville Fly-In applauded.

Then two parachutists jumped, one standing atop the other's chute as they floated toward the crowd. The applause grew as they fell to earth.

Next came the grand parachutists' finale.

"Please stand for our national anthem," commanded the voice booming from speakers throughout Watsonville Municipal Airport. Eyes turned upward as the strains to the "Star Spangled Banner" poured forth and a final parachutist, trailing an American flag and hanging from a red, white and blue parachute, flew through the sky.

"Ladies and gentleman! This is America! And this is Watsonville!," screamed the announcer when the anthem concluded and the parachute touched down.

What more was there to say? Not much. And it's a good thing, because the roar of planes at the airport made conversation tough much of the time.

But that didn't seem to bother the crowd of more than 10,000 people who moved from food booth (corn dogs, cokes, french fried artichokes) to food booth (burgers, ice cream, burritos) while keeping their

eyes fixed on the sky above.

For those who had their fill of food, there were plenty of booths selling aviator jewelry, aviator jackets, aviator books and aviator art (jet pilot Chuck Yeager being a favorite subject).

But the real action was in the air.

As Cecilia Aragon of Berkeley piloted her red Pitts sport biplane overhead, announcer Bob Devries of Los Gatos kept up a steady bark of information.

"Cecilia is only 5 foot 2 inches, 105 pounds," Devries told the crowd with gusto. "She has to have blocks on her rubber pedals in order to fly, but watch that baby perform.

"Here we go with a double snap . . ." Devries said as Aragon spun her plane up, down and around. The plane somersaulted, shot straight up, then straight down, did loops, and all the while Devries expressed the crowd's awe.

When Aragon began her descent, Devries instructed the crowd in Fly-in etiquette.

"She can't hear your applause," Devries said. "So wave your hands and hats."

A sea of hats and hands began waving at Aragon and continued until she touched ground.

Moments after her plane was down daredevil Eddie Andreini took off, spewing red and green smoke from his Super Stearman. And necks again craned upward as a whole new set of maneuvers and breathtaking tricks went on display.



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Allen Silver drops in with Old Glory.



A group that flew in from Santa Maria keeps track of the action above.

Photos by Shmuel Thaler

West Coast Antique Fly-in and Air Show

- Open today from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Watsonville Municipal Airport. Access on Airport Boulevard.
- Auto parking, \$3. Free shuttle buses from parking lots to main gate all day.
- Admission adults \$7; Seniors and 6 to 12 \$ 3.50.
- Air show begins at noon.