

Air show a roaring success



Dala Bruemmer/Register-Pajaronian

Marine Lance Cpl. Sean Sandiford tosses a cable to Cpl. Ben DeJarnett as the two prepare to tie down the 79-foot blades of a CH-53 helicopter Saturday at the end of the air show.

KP 5-2807

Crowds flock in for military jets despite cloud cover, cold

By DALA BRUEMMER
FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The fog hung low and temperatures barely crept past 60 degrees, but turnout hit an all-time high at the Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show over the weekend. And the level of enthusiasm wasn't far behind.

Attendance on Saturday — typical-

ly the day of highest attendance at this Friday-through-Sunday annual event — hit a record-breaking 15,000, said marketing director Dave Brockmann. He attributed the turnout to the Harrier and Hornet fighter jets that performed in this year's show.

The military planes were the hands-down hit of the weekend. The crowd

ooh-ed and ah-ed appreciatively through aerobatic performances by pilots Eddie Andreini, Frank Donnelly and the four-plane formations of the Thunder Delfins. But when two F-18 Hornets swooped past with a deafening roar, jaws dropped and kids

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Pilot Buddy Robinson of Salinas (right) gets a closer look at a cutaway radial engine on display at the air show Saturday. Robinson said the engine bore similarities to that of a Chinese Nanchang military training plane he owns.

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jumped on top of hay bales, craning their necks for another glimpse of the agile fighter planes.

"Where did he come from?" asked Coleton Willis of Prunedale as a Hornet whipped in from the south.

"That's an F-18 Hornet, dude! That's bad, dude!" his friend Danny Radel yelled in thrilled approval.

Low clouds kept the Harriers and Hornets from performing their full program Saturday, but that didn't lessen the dazzling effect their speed, agility and roaring engines had on the crowd, which seemed to enjoy a hide-and-seek tension as the pilots steered long distances beneath the fog layer, then whipped back from different directions.

Skies cleared Sunday afternoon just long enough for the military craft to wow the crowd — and the entire city of Watsonville — with an even more spectacular display. But Saturday's fog was a blessing of sorts, said Buddy Robinson of Salinas.

"We got to see all the airplanes up close because they had to do low-altitude flying," he said.

Military craft drew plenty of attention on the ground, too. Show-goers seemed to relish the opportunity to tour Naval and Marine helicopters and two Air Force transport planes.

And with more than 200 private planes also on display — many of them antiques — plus two days of vintage car shows, there was something for every taste and interest level.

Manuel, Rebecca and Nick Valdes drove from Manteca to see the World War II planes featured in the show. Each family member had an eye on their favorite: Rebecca wanted to see the B-17 bomber "Sentimental Journey," Nick wanted to see the P-40 and the P-51 Mustang, and Manuel came for the Japanese A6M Zero.



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ABOVE: Spectators look on as a Marine pilot climbs into the cockpit of an AV-8 Harrier fighter jet to test the engines after performing in Saturday's air show. BELOW: Sean Farley of Watsonville peers down from the towering cockpit of a C-180 Hercules cargo plane. The Hercules was one of several military planes on display, drawing a steady stream of curious spectators and delighted kids.



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— Arden Franklin of Santa Monica

ther was an Air Force pilot and flight instructor, so coming to the show and admiring the old military "warbird" planes is a way of remembering him.

"It's meaningful for us," said Matt.

The Farley family of Watsonville also attends yearly. "We love it!" said mom Kathy. "We can hear it over by our house, but there's nothing like being here."

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Debbie Katz of Folsom preferred the stunt planes.

"It's the stunts and the acrobatics and the things they do up in the air," she said. "You can't see that everywhere. The tricks make you ooh and ah."

"My favorite part is when the Army planes take off," said Gavin Kirby of Santa Cruz.

For pilots and plane buffs, the show serves another purpose.

"It's a big social event for us," said Eric Presten of Sonoma, who flew in a 1949 Piper PA-16 Clipper with floats that he uses for both family trips and an in-air photography business.

"It's a getaway, it's camaraderie. You chat with people who have an interest in airplanes, look at airplanes you dream about having," said Arden Franklin of Santa Monica, who flew in for the weekend in his V-tail Bonanza airplane. "I think the fly-in portion of this event is what makes it so unique. You see just about every kind of aircraft."

The air show is an annual tradition for many non-pilots, too. Matt and Danielle Grenier of Santa Cruz, together with their son Jordan, come each year. Danielle's late grandfa-