

DR. D's Old-Time Aerobatics

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Call or e-mail for digital photography

Dr. D and his 1946 Taylorcraft continue to “Wow” audiences from California to Washington!

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Based at Cable Airport in Upland, California, Dr. Frank Donnelly (Dr. D.) and his 1946 T-Cart are bringing back old-time aerobatics to the air show circuit. With 50 successful shows and 130 actual performances in the last five years, Dr. D is a proven air show performer. He has a level one (ground level) waiver.

Crowds and air show organizers love the show. Why? Dr. D's act is very different from the fast-paced, abrupt-maneuvering acts so common today. “The Taylorcraft flies slowly and gracefully, rather than doing the neck-wrenching tumbles of modern aerobatic airplanes,” he says. He also does a twilight/night aerobatic show with 30 strobe lights on the plane.

A retired psychology professor from Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California, Donnelly started flying aerobatics in a WW II-era PT-26 Fairchild trainer. Later on, he graduated to a 1952 British Royal Air Force Chipmunk. “I really enjoy flying the old aerobatic airplanes. They are part of the history of aerobatics, and they're a pleasure to watch,” Donnelly continues.

When he was just six years old, Donnelly yearned to fly after his father took him to an air show. His first flight was in a Piper Cub when he was 10. “Duane Cole was my inspiration. He flew a clipped-wing Taylorcraft in air shows all over the country in the 1950s, 60s and beyond. He made aerobatics look easy. I wanted to do those smooth graceful aerobatics like he did.”

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Donnelly's favorite maneuver? The engine-off landing. "Landing with the prop stopped takes a lot of planning. So do the loop and roll that I perform with the engine off. These are classic Duane Cole maneuvers," says Donnelly. The twilight/ night strobe act is also a favorite. He says, "Flying aerobatics in the dark is a unique experience in itself."

Earning his pilot's license in 1968, Donnelly has logged approximately 6,000 hours of flight time in mostly old-time aircraft, and holds commercial pilot single-engine land and private pilot glider ratings. He's also certified as a glider tow pilot with about 8,000 tows. Not only is Donnelly a doctor of psychology, he's also a "doctor" of airplane mechanics, holding the highest mechanic ratings offered: Airframe/Powerplant and aircraft Inspector Authorization. He was also honored to serve as the mechanic for the U.S. Unlimited Aerobatic Team when they competed in the World Air Games in Burgos, Spain in 2001.

Donnelly flies a 1946 Taylorcraft (N6588C) with a Swick conversion to improve aerobatic performance. The plane has shorter wings (clipped-wing conversion), one seat rather than two seats; larger control surfaces; 120-hp Lycoming engine rather than a 65-hp Continental; and experimental rather than standard category licensing.

Until 2000, Taylorcraft N6588C was flown in the Southeast, where it was eventually converted to a pure aerobatic airplane. Over the years it deteriorated, and when Donnelly purchased it, the plane needed a total overhaul. It took him three years and approximately 800 hours to complete the transformation.

Donnelly's eye-catching, low-key act is unique in today's world of expensive, high-speed, turn-up-the-volume aircraft. "Very few pilots are flying old-time aerobatics. I want people to see what air shows were like in the 50s and 60s and to understand that you don't need an expensive airplane to do good aerobatics."

In addition to flying air shows, Donnelly is an experienced glider tow pilot. He has logged more than 2,000 hours towing sailplanes. Donnelly also owns a vintage Libelle sailplane, which he flies in the Southern California desert and mountains.

Dr. D's Old-Time Aerobatics is available for the 2010 air show season. For information, call 909-592-1928, 591-532-1203 or e-mail fadme@aol.com.

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