

Volume 35, No. 12

AFRICA'S LEADING AVIATION JOURNAL

AIR NEWS

for continental Africa

MUSTANG —
Cessna's new thoroughbred

**VERY LIGHT JET REVIEW
AIR SHOW ACCIDENT OVERVIEW
NEW AEROBATIC TEAM TAKES OFF
COUNTDOWN BEGINS FOR AAD 2008**



FEBRUARY 2008

INCORPORATING *WINGS OVER AFRICA* and *AFRICAN AIR TRANSPORT*
South Africa: R24.00 (inc VAT), Other countries in Southern Africa: R21.05 (ex Tax)
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NEW AEROBATIC TEAM TAKES OFF

Text: World Airnews reporters
Photos: Grant Fraser

THE DOYEN of South African professional aerobatics, Scully Levin, is to lead the new Gabriel Wings Aerobatic Flight Team 2008 which is to make its first public appearance during the Round The Island Yacht Race at Deneyville, on the Vaal Dam, on February 3, before entering a year-long season flying at the top air shows around the country.

The team consists of Scully Levin as leader, his son, Ellis, as left wingman, and Arnie Meneghelli, as right wingman. His married daughter, Sally Bates, is undergoing training for the team and thus becomes the first female aerobatic pilot in South Africa.

One of her first flights with the team after its formal launch was for the "photo shoot" of the aircraft. Other pilots who will provide back-up for the team are Stewart Lithgow and his son, Neil.

The Gabriel Wings Aerobatic flight Team has been under development for the past five months and is a follow-on to the Control Instruments and Shurlok teams, all of which have been sponsored by the Control Instruments group for several years.

Asked about the reasons behind the Gabriel company's involvement in aerobatics and its sponsorship of the team, Grant Fraser, strategic planning manager for CI Automotive and Gabriel Wings' project manager, had this to say: "It makes good sense for Gabriel to be associated with aerobatics. It is something that is very close to our hearts – to grow this awareness of what Gabriel is all about."



"It is more than just making shock absorbers. It is a brand. It is a company. It is people and people who work as a team. It is people who work on technical improvements; on raising the game in the market place through its technical competence and good quality," he said.

QUIRK OF FATE

By a strange quirk of fate, airline flights between Cape Town and Johannesburg have twice played a role in the aerobatic teams which Scully Levin has led during

the past two decades.

In the mid-1980s, the managing director of a large security company purchased a copy of *World Airnews* before boarding a flight to Johannesburg. In it he read that the Winfield aerobatic team had been disbanded and that Scully was seeking a new sponsor. He telephoned Scully shortly after landing in Johannesburg and the Chubb Aerobatic Team was born and was to fly for many years.

The second time involved two members of the Gabriel internal design studio.



The full Gabriel Wings Aerobatic Flight Team 2008 is shown in front one of its Pitts Specials. In the back row (left to right) are Grant Fraser (strategic planning manager, CI Automotive and Gabriel Wings project manager); Louis Blom (sales and marketing director, CI Automotive); Conrad Schmidt (managing director, CI Automotive); Neil Lithgow (back-up pilot) and Ellis Levin (left wingman). Kneeling, middle row (l to r): Paula Missing (graphic designer, CI Automotive); Scully Levin (Gabriel Wings team leader); Arnie Meneghelli (right wingman) and Stewart Lithgow (back-up pilot). Front row, sitting: Sally Bates, (back-up pilot).

The insignia logo of Gabriel Wings in the very raw stage was conceptualised on the flight using an airsick bag to do some rough sketches. The bag was handed to Paula Missing who used the rough sketches as a guide to develop a stylised drawing which was very clean and which was the basis for the logos now adorning the three Pitts Specials of the team.

The emphasis on the design of the livery for the aircraft was to make them "the best-looking planes on the runway at any air show".

TEAM LEADER

Team leader, Scully Levin, is by far the best-known aerobatic pilot in South Africa. He was instrumental in the late 1970s and early 1980s in getting the first sponsored aerobatic teams in South Africa.

Tom Chalmers, managing editor of *World Airnews*, recalls: "I remember meeting Scully in a hangar at

Pietermaritzburg's Oribi Airport in the late 1970s. He was busy cleaning an aircraft he was to fly later that day. He told me his dream was to see a professional aerobatic team flying in South Africa similar to the then Rothmans' Aerobatic Team in the UK and the Rayban Golds in Canada.

"I remember being impressed by his determination and was therefore not surprised when, soon afterwards, Scully was able to launch his dream with the Playboy Pitts, albeit only a single aircraft at that time. But it was not long before his vision of a full three-plane team was to be realised," he said.

Scully is a senior captain with South African Airways and has logged about 25 000 hours flying everything from light singles to the largest airliners such as the Boeing 747 and Airbus A340. His actual air show career spans over 25 years and he has flown over 1 500 displays in a wide variety of aircraft ranging from the

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Sally Bates, Scully Levin's daughter who is believed to be the first South African woman aerobatic pilot, is seen here in the Pitts Special she flew during the photo shoot for this feature article. She flew in the middle slot of the formation (see photo on Page 60).

Pitts Specials, Harvards, other World War II Warbirds to the Boeing 737, 747 and Airbus A340-600 at these shows.

His view of the new Gabriel team? "The aircraft look absolutely stunning and you just can't help flying with a whole new dynamic feeling in such beautiful airplanes. I think the colour scheme is striking and there is an old saying in aviation: 'If it looks good, it is good.' That is how I feel about it.

"So we will be able to interface with the public and maintain a very, very good relationship with our sponsors and enjoy ourselves flying these airplanes," Levin added.

TEAM MEMBERS

Left wingman is Ellis Levin, Scully's son, who started flying formation aerobatics within two years of having left school.

He has logged a total of nearly 10 000 hours and is now in his 15th year as an air show pilot. He has vast display experience in Harvards, Zlin 50s and Pitts Specials. Ellis flies Airbus A340s on SAA's international routes.

Right wingman is Arnie Meneghelli who has been active as a display pilot for the past ten years and has flown for both the Flying Lions Aerobatic Team in Harvards, and in the Control Instruments Aerobatic Team in its Zlins and Pitts Specials.

Stewart Lithgow is one of the pilots who provide back-up for the team. He is a high-time captain on SAA Airbus A340s. Neil, his son, also serves as a back-up pilot for the team.

Sally Bates, Scully's married daughter, is "under development" as a team pilot. She is currently a first officer on SAA Boeing 737s and is believed to be the first woman aerobatic pilot in South Africa, certainly the first as a member of a professional team.

The team's schedule of displays for the rest of the year still has to be finalised, but will definitely include appearances at the EAA's annual show and fly-in, and at Margate, Groblersdal, Rand Airport, Bloemfontein, Nelspruit, Durban, Swaziland, Vereeniging and Mafikeng. →

TWO MANUFACTURERS CELEBRATE 8 000 DELIVERIES

TWO US manufacturers, Cessna Aircraft and Robinson Helicopters, recently delivered their respective 8 000th aircraft.

In Cessna's case it was the 8 000th single-engine piston (SEP) aircraft since resuming production in Independence, Kansas, over 11 years ago, and for Robinson it was the flight certification of its 8 000th helicopter, a R44 Raven II, prior to customer delivery.

The customer for the Cessna milestone aircraft was the US Civil Air Patrol (CAP), Cessna's largest and one of the company's oldest customers.

The Civil Air Patrol, a volunteer force of more than 66 000 members of the US Air Force Auxiliary, has a fleet of more than 530 aircraft flying across the country, primarily in search and rescue missions. The milestone aircraft delivered recently is the 178th taken by CAP since the restart.

Cessna produces the Skyhawk,

Skylane, Stationair and Citation Mustang at its facility in Independence, located southeast of the company's headquarters in Wichita.

The Independence facility was built when Cessna re-entered the single-engine piston aircraft market following a 10-year absence. The first Independence-made SEP was delivered in 1996.

Robinson's 8 000th helicopter is destined for Sky Sales Aviation, of Christchurch, New Zealand, which has been a Robinson dealer and service centre for over 20 years.

The Robinson Helicopter Company was founded in 1973 and the first R22 was delivered in 1979. In 1993 the R44 came online and is now the best-selling helicopter in the world.

It is offered in two models, the Raven I and the more powerful Raven II. The latter is offered in four speciality configurations: the Police Helicopter; Newscopter; Clipper and IFR Trainer. →