



Ready or not: Sandra Armbruster looks the part in protective head gear, headphones and you'll have to take her word for it, long, white silk scarf as she prepares to experience aerobatics. And, she'd do it all again.

STAFF PHOTOS BY GUY WARRREN

Sky Queen: Reporter previews AirMichigan

BY SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

Staff Writer
About five seconds is all it took to decide whether I wanted to chance a ride in a biplane, an event planned to promote AirMichigan '93 show at Willow Run Airport this weekend. At least, that's how long it took to shoot my way into the assignment over the office clamor.

After all, I told colleagues, I'm halfway through a lifetime and when opportunity knocks, well, you don't let someone else answer the door.

Not everyone was so enthusiastic. My boss mentioned something about "air sickness" and my father, ever cautious, asked if I really wanted to do this.

But memories of a Saturday morning TV show from my youth left me thinking again about a cattle rancher named Sky King and his niece, Penny, who roamed the Wild Blue Yonder while helping people. True, there was a more sophisticated (read enclosed) Piper Cub. Hey! I like fresh air.

Women aviators

Besides, I'm not the first woman to fly in a plane. You can forget the Amelia Earhart jokes; the air show will feature in its lineup 25-year veteran aviator Julia Clark performing a solo aerobatic routine in her 12th air show season.

With more than 18,000 accident-free hours in the air, Clark is a captain for Northwest Airlines as well and can fly more than 55 types of aircraft. Her honors include 1985 General Aviation News Performer of the Year and Female Performer of the Year in 1988 and 1990. She also lists such credits as doing PBS specials, serving as co-host for the special "Sky-Dancers" and working with PM Magazine.

However, I'm getting ahead of my story.

I was awake at 4:30 the morning of the flight, making a visual check of weather conditions. Too dark to see, I sought help from my favorite weather forecaster. "Clouds clearing out by afternoon," she said.

My fretting was unnecessary.

By 10 a.m. flight time, a brilliant blue sky greeted photographer Guy Warren and me at hangar one at Willow Run.

A good reporter always checks the spelling of a source's name. "Rick, how do you spell your last name?" I asked.

"That's Rip, as in Rest in Peace," he responded. There was general laughter; I was not among those laughing, especially when Rip Hayes, 42, of Bloomfield Township, mentioned that he hadn't brought parachutes along for the flight.

We checked out the plane, a reproduction of a 1935 Waco YMF, which Hayes has based at the Troy airport. The 7 cylinder, 275 horsepower plane has a spruce wood wing span of 30 feet and is 35 feet long. The propeller is laminated, hardwood maple.

"It's fully aerobatic," said Hayes, which I was about to find out.

The plane carries a 50-gallon fuel tank and, yes, Hayes said, it was full.

Getting ready

Getting ready for the flight took some preparation: Hayes outfitted me in protective head gear, headphones and, of course, a long, white, silk scarf to make the flight complete. After making sure I was secured by a lap and shoulder harness, Hayes climbed aboard and contacted the tower.

We meandered, literally, toward Charlie runway.

"I have to make S-turns because I can't see where I'm going," Hayes said. That wasn't terribly comforting, but it was logical. While on the ground, the plane sits at a steep angle with its nose in the air, blocking the pilot's view. That all changes once airborne.

Liftoff seemed effortless and soon we were flying at 1,200 feet. "The plane will fly as high as 17,500 feet," Hayes said.

The air was warm and the scenery beautiful. I could imagine myself on one of Hayes' rides along Mackinac and the beaches when he is based in Petoskey during the summer months.

We started with a few "easy" banks and rolls. "The tendency most people have is to lean away from the side of the plane," Hayes said, noting what I had been doing. "It's more fun if you lean with the plane."

Following his advice made the trip much more enjoyable.

After contacting the Ann Arbor tower, we flew over that city and the University of Michigan stadium, then Domino's Farms. Leaving Ann Arbor airspace, Hayes suggested that we try a few aerobatic moves.

Right moves

We started banking easily through half a Lazy Eight. Next was a Chandelle. "We have to raise the airspeed to 140 mph first," Hayes explained. What he didn't say was how he was going to raise the speed. Suddenly the nose of the plane — and remember I was sitting in the forward cockpit — was headed in a nosedive. I imagined myself in one of those old war movies.

Soon we were banking hard in one of the most thrilling parts of the ride.

I just had time to catch my breath when Hayes was on the intercom. "Have you ever heard of a plane going into a stall?" I had, but admitted I didn't know what it meant.

"Most people think it means the engine stops, but that's not true," said Hayes, a 24-year flight

veteran. "The wings stop flying. Want to try it?" I did, and kept looking at the wings as the air speed dropped. I don't know what I expected to see.

At 70 mph there was a thud and the plane dropped altitude horizontally. I'm glad no one could see the expression on my face at the time.

Then it was time to head back to Willow Run and a feather light landing.

Golden Knights

Feet planted firmly back in adulthood, I can safely tell you that there won't be any kings at the shows, but there will be 19 knights, all members of the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team.

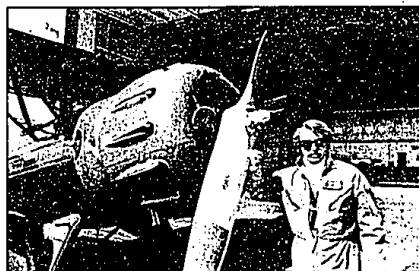
The team has produced 100 world champions and 22 world champions in the 1980s. Among them are Cheryl Stearns and Terry Bennet Varee. The team now has two demonstration teams, two

competition teams, a style and accuracy team, a relative work team, an aviation section and a headquarters section.

Air shows are Saturday and Sunday, but highlighting the Sunday show only will be the Stealth F-117A fighter, a radar-eluding aircraft used during Operation Desert Storm. The aircraft, which operates at high subsonic speed, is nearly 66 feet long with a wing span of more than 43 feet.

Joining them for the air show are Hayes, the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels, wingwalker Johnny Kaiani, solo aerobatic pilots Dave Dacy and Sean Tucker, military demonstrations and static displays and top Soviet pilot Alexander Zuyev in what is expected to be the biggest show ever.

As far as I'm concerned, a biplane is the only way to fly. There's only one thing Hayes didn't explain. Where do I put my suitcases?



Fly guy: Rip "as in Rest in Peace" Hayes of Bloomfield Township will be flying this reproduction of a 1935 Waco YMF in the weekend air show.

Here's the scoop:

WHAT: AirMichigan '93 at Willow Run Airport.

WHEN: Saturday and Sunday; gates open at 9 a.m.; Saturday's shows begin at noon due to live television coverage.

WHO: U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute team; military fly by; U.S. Navy Blue Angels; Stealth fighter on Saturday only; aerobatic flyers; and wing walkers.

GETTING THERE: Take I-94 west to Belleville Road and exit. Go north to the Meijers store, and turn left, going to gate of show.

OR, take I-275 south to Ecorse Road and exit westbound to Beck Road. Turn left where you will be directed to the gate.

TICKETS: Available at all TicketMaster outlets and at the AirMichigan office at Willow Run. Advance general admission tickets, through Friday, are \$9 for adults and \$6 for children 6-11. At the gate tickets are \$12 for adults and \$9 for children. Reserved box seats are \$16. Parking is \$3. Children age 6 and younger are admitted free.

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