

# AOPA

## 2005 Air Race Classic

BY JULIE K. BOATMAN

The [2005 Air Race Classic](#) commenced in West Lafayette, Indiana; the race itself was flown from June 21-24 following a round-robin course from Purdue University Airport, to Winona, Minnesota; Beatrice, Nebraska; Bartlesville, Oklahoma; Shreveport, Louisiana; Walnut Ridge, Arkansas; Tullahoma, Tennessee; Athens, Ohio; and returning to Purdue. This year, 42 teams competed in the all-women's race, which has its origins in the Powder Puff Derby of 1929. This was the 29th Air Race Classic.



### Air Race Classic 2005 announces winners

The 29th Air Race Classic concluded this weekend with 40 teams completing the more than 2,100-nm journey. After the last racer made it back to Lafayette, Indiana, safely by the cutoff time on Friday afternoon, it was time to tally the scores and enjoy one last blast of camaraderie before announcing the winners. The top 12 airplanes underwent a final inspection on Saturday to ensure that no modifications had been made during the race. A luncheon on Sunday at the Purdue University football stadium's skybox brought racers together to discuss improvements for the race in coming years and to debrief what went well — and so much did.

For the first time in ARC history, the results weren't announced until the closing banquet, and the suspense was high. But veteran racer Sophia Payton, with copilot Marilyn Paterno and passenger Erica Cochoff, took first place, and the \$5,000 prize, in Payton's Cessna 172. ARC President Judy Bolkema Tokar, copilot Sarah Bean, and passenger Ann Williams came in second, and Bonnie Johnson and Carol Foy came in third.

The collegiate team of Sarah Tower and Erica Ebenhoeh from Western Michigan University won the top college team award and came in eighth place overall.

Classic 10 completed the race in 10th place, a position to be extremely proud of, given the close nature of the race — scores were determined to a one-thousandth of a knot to create the standings.

The folks at Purdue left a tough act to follow, but those behind the Air Race Classic are more than up to the challenge. The 2006 Air Race Classic begins in Mesa, Arizona, and terminates in Menominee, Michigan. The race runs from June 21-24. For more information, see the [Web site](#).



Classic 10 joins other teams at the airport on Saturday for a post-race inspection.



ARC winner Sophia Payton (left) looks on as volunteers inspect her 172 following the race.



Lining the stage, 85 racers celebrate the conclusion of the 2005 Air Race Classic.



Racers from Classic 32 and Classic 28 "debrief" in the skybox at Purdue's football stadium.



Ruby Sheldon thanks her new friends (John Schumaker, Mike Kenney, Dustin Wilcox, and Josh) just a few of the many volunteers from Purdue who made the race happen.

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## A Day-Three Finish — June 23, 2005

Our restful stop in Walnut Ridge left us rarin' to go on Thursday morning. But again we had to wait for the haze to break up over the higher country in Tennessee — home to our next stop, Tullahoma.

For an hour, we watch the crop dusters ply nearby fields, Ag Cats and Air Tractors popping in and out of range in the morning sun. Then the haze breaks just enough, and we say goodbye to the Arkansas 99s chapter and airport folks. After takeoff on Runway 13, we climb out over flooded fields growing rice and come back around for the flyby down Runway 4. After having briefed each flyby during the marathon session on Monday, it's satisfying to fly the timing lines at each airport smoothly — each airport chart pops into 3D.

We sniff around for any semblance of a tailwind and find a reasonable push between 1,000 feet msl and 1,460 feet msl. We pick the higher altitude as it puts us about 1,000 feet above the wooded hills and countryside — the perfect point from which to see through the haze (while flying into the sun) and remain well clear of obstructions.

We cross the Mississippi again, the haze collecting in the lowlands and bringing the visibility closer to 4 miles. Let me tell you, 4 miles isn't much when you cover that in a minute! But the murkier air is confined to the area immediately surrounding the river, and the vis comes up to 6 miles plus in short order.

At Tullahoma, we don't have a waiver for a low flyby (the FSDO didn't think we needed one), but for safety's sake the race organizers determined the flybys would take place at 700 feet agl. We taxi in past a DC-3 and a turbine Twin Beech long idle (and sans engines) on the ramp. But the real museum pieces at Tullahoma Regional/William Northern Field are found in the Staggerwing Museum. Not only does the museum keep many examples of its namesake airplane, but also features an exhaustive — and still growing — collection of Beech aircraft, including one of its latest additions, the Beech Model 2000A Starship. A Bonanza-Baron Museum is also in the works.

We are doubly sad that we can't stay when we find out that the airport community is throwing a hangar barbecue for the racers tonight (they also threw one the night before for good measure). Tullahoma is just down the road from Lynchburg, home to Jack Daniels; we have travel-sized samples in our goody bags — clearly for later enjoyment.

But we have to take advantage of a building southwesterly flow and press on. The leg from Tullahoma to Ohio University Snyder Field in Athens goes over several gorgeous rivers and lakes — the air-to-air frequency that all racers use to communicate with each other en route is alive with calls of "Did you see that waterfall at 275 nm out?" and "Are you over the cabin with the red roof at 219 nm?" (references to position are made in miles from the destination, as all racers fly the most direct route).

The aerial conversation serves several purposes — first is safety-related. Because we all use GPS to fly the course, and we strive to fly very accurately, racers can overtake each other, and those who do communicate to those they overtake that they are passing. And if an airplane has an equipment problem or emergency, the frequency is used for gathering information and assistance. Early in the race, a team had to make a precautionary landing on a highway, and they announced their predicament on the air-to-air frequency. They got on the ground safely, obtained more fuel, and took off again into the headwind to continue the race.

Also, the radio chatter serves as an announcement and advertisement for the race to other pilots in the area. Some racers found out about the race by overhearing pilot calls on a previous ARC.

The flyby at Athens goes off like clockwork, and we make one more stop for fuel. We could have flown by, but there are two reasons why we chose not to. First, the added weight of the extra fuel required would slow us down — and every knot counts! But also, we would miss meeting the people who are hosting the stops; we are humbled by their efforts to make sure we have food and water (copious amounts) and rides to town and hotels for staying overnight and things to do if we spend more than a couple of hours. Truly, the general aviation community across the country is a family.

We launch for the last leg into the late afternoon sun. We've planned to get to Lafayette tonight in case the winds that were forecast for tomorrow are worse — they could hardly be better. Again, with a little hunting we find a quartering tailwind, which switches to a crosswind and builds in strength as we zoom westward. *C'est la vie*. We're happy that it's not a headwind — we managed to stay out of headwinds on the entire trip, which I see as a small miracle given our circular course around the midsection of the country.

Our final flyby at Frankfort, Indiana, goes well, and our official race time is logged. Gretchen puts out the speed brakes to slow us down a bit for the short flight back to Lafayette. We want to savor the moment and enjoy the fact that we no longer have to fly full out and precisely on track and altitude. There's no doubt in my mind that racing makes you a better pilot.

On the ground at Lafayette, we're greeted by the Purdue crew — it feels like we're coming home and seeing old friends. As we gather our things from the airplane, we determine that we took on at least 15 extra pounds in goody bags and presents from the people we've met at each stop. We'll divvy up the loot once we get back to the hotel.

Tomorrow is one more day for the racers to complete the course, then Saturday the top ten aircraft are inspected once more (to determine no one swapped out an engine along the way!) before we find out who wins on Sunday at the banquet.

Look for a final wrap-up on Monday.



A crop duster turns over fields just beyond the Walnut Ridge Airport in northeastern Arkansas.



Classic 26 parks in the shadow of a "decommissioned" 737 at Walnut Ridge.



On the ramp at Tullahoma, racers strategize for the next leg. No one's in a real big hurry because there is little wind.



Racers on the ramp at Ohio University Snyder Field in Athens, Ohio.



Arkansas 99s provide the timing at Walnut Ridge. Other 99s chapters on the route do the same or provide hospitality to the racers.



The flyby at Tullahoma.



Gorgeous rivers criss-cross the region in northern Tennessee and southern Kentucky.



The final flyby at Frankfort — a lonely job because no racers plan a stop there.



Turning base for Runway 23 at Lafayette.

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## A Short Second Day — June 22, 2005

An hour or two after sunrise, Ruby calls me to the window of the room in the Hollywood Casino, where we all collapsed after yesterday's four legs of flying. The sun is just breaking through the top of the haze layer, glowing red and lighting the river banks.

While beautiful, the haze prompts a check of local METARs: Though Shreveport Downtown is reporting 3 miles visibility, the military base next door is only 2.5 miles. Stations to the northeast along our route waver between IFR and marginal VFR. We decide to move slowly this morning to give the muck a chance to dissipate. Since we'll be flying somewhat into the sun, and at lower altitudes, we want visibility to be better than marginal VFR before we launch. We wake up a taxi driver, snoring heavily, outside the hotel, and we're off to the airport.

After breakfast (grits are heavily featured!) the skies are brightening, and we pile into the Mooney. Breakfast was kindly provided for each racer at the airport restaurant by one of the local pilots. Once aloft we find winds that are better than forecast at a very specific altitude — the forecasts aren't fine enough to predict every air current, though they help us greatly with ballparking whether to climb or stay low.

The air is fairly smooth all the way to Walnut Ridge (KARG — hence, I've titled it "the pirate leg" — AARRRGGG!). We note that the wind may be favorable for the next leg after all and stop for needed gas and to file another flight plan.

However, by the time we take on 10 gallons a side and have a snack, I'm able to download current winds from several nearby stations, and it looks like what we had has tapered off. We decide we need a break anyway and call it a day at Walnut Ridge.

Walnut Ridge is a former military training base, and a museum at the airport details this history. After World War II, KARG also became a boneyard for decommissioned military airplanes. It continues this role, as airport manager Ken Newcomb tells us of his business on the field parting out old McDonnell-Douglas MD-88s and Boeing 737s. In fact, several shells of airliners sit on the northwest corner of the field.

Two days left, and three legs to fly. There's some strategy to work out, as a low-pressure system is expected to drop down from Canada over the next couple days. Will it stir up winds in the right direction?

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## The Race Begins — June 21, 2005

What are the chances that one day would include Lafayette, Indiana; Winona, Minnesota; Beatrice, Nebraska; Bartlesville, Oklahoma; and Shreveport, Louisiana? Only in the world of general aviation — and rarely outside of the world of air racing.

At the morning's briefing and weather discussion, we find out that we have "Wiznerowicz Weather" — a miracle has occurred in honor of start/terminus organizer Keri Wiznerowicz. The weather that would supposedly wreak havoc on Winona this morning has disappeared. So, with not a thought of looking to see where it went, we quietly and anxiously went out to the airplanes. I had downloaded weather and winds, Ruby had prepared her charts, and Gretchen had her kneeboard with headings and

altitudes — and that pretty much sums up our duties. I'm the weather service, Ruby is the navigator, and Gretchen is the autopilot.

On the first leg to Winona, the forecast was for headwinds. Since we had to launch at a preset time, we couldn't choose to wait for better winds. Although it would be hard to watch everyone go and not join them! So we made lemonade out of lemons and stayed low. We stayed out of the worst of those winds and made Winona in 1:40 and change. (We landed there even though we didn't need gas so that we could check the weather.)

At the Winona airport, the local pilots and townsfolk pulled out all the stops. We opened up the door of the airplane to the sounds of a deejay announcing our arrival, several reporters wanting to talk with us, and a small crowd of enthusiastic spectators. It was a nice end to the leg. We checked weather, refiled a flight plan (all racers must be on a VFR flight plan), and cleaned the airplane of bugs.

Without much delay, we hopped back in for another flyby to start our timing for the next leg. Winona lies in a bend in the Mississippi River valley, down in the valley on islands in the river. In fact, as we taxied in, we were welcomed to "the island city," which had struck us as particularly funny because the identifier for the airport is KONA. As we turned onto the timing run, we swooped down below the ridges of the valley, and it gave me a sense of the speed we had built for the flyby. Those flybys are clearly the adrenaline part of racing.

And we're on the road to Beatrice because another weather miracle has occurred — a big cell sped through the area early in the morning and then also, mysteriously, disappeared. Knowing you can't get something for nothing in this life, I understand the weather *will* come find us at some point — but in the meantime, we make hay while the sun shines.

We hunt aloft for decent winds, finally capturing a good tailwind near 6,000 feet. The instant wind vector on the Garmin G1000 in the airplane is already earning its keep. In the airplane, I'm also using a NavAir electronic flight bag running Wx Worx datalink weather via XM Satellite Radio for updates. More on this later.

At Beatrice, we fuel up (literally — since we were required to leave Lafayette topped off, we didn't need to refuel at Winona, having tankered an extra 70 gallons there) and feed ourselves from the spread that the Nebraska Ninety-Nines have laid out for us. Looking south, an easy leg to Bartlesville is a no-brainer. The reason? Another big mesoscale complex is incurring its thunderstorming wrath on South Dakota, and we want to avoid getting caught by it overnight. And the winds heading south aren't great but aren't bad.

One of the important logistical details of the race is how an airport operator will arrange to refuel up to 40 airplanes coming through within a short period of time. So when we were told that Bartlesville, Oklahoma, had a fleet of trucks ready to service us, we were momentarily confused until finding that Bartlesville is the home of ConocoPhillips. No wonder! And though we blow through near the head of the pack — Classic 2, another Mooney, had landed before us — indeed the service is very efficient. More snacks, this time provided by Oklahoma Ninety-Nines and local pilots, and a cold bottle of water give us the wherewithal to press on to Shreveport before sunset.

From a winds point of view, it isn't critical to move on — winds are forecast light and variable or light out of the south both Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning. But a weather system expected later in the week gives us incentive to get a jump on the next day — as well as an opportunity to fly into Shreveport in decent visibility.

Again, we search for good winds and find an altitude where the wind is quartering from behind — a gift! The haze grows as we fly south, and the slant range visibility comes down a bit. Luckily we are flying away from the sun and never have less than 5 miles. Mountains collect weather, no matter what their elevation. So it was no surprise finding the Ozarks a little hazier than the rest of the route.

A little less than 50 miles out we begin a slow descent, keeping our indicated airspeed in the yellow arc in the smooth air and admiring the groundspeed as it breaks through 200 knots once again. At Shreveport Downtown airport, local pilots greet us and arrange for a hotel (we had overflowed our last reservation) and drive us there. Shreveport has big casinos to attract tourists from neighboring states, and we hole up at the Hollywood tonight.

Two more airplanes will make it as far as Shreveport tonight, with others stopping at Bartlesville and Beatrice. Tomorrow, we'll see what the weather brings.



Joyce Wells (left) and Kathy Walton prepare Classic 12 for the first leg to Winona. Every airplane starts the race with full tanks.



Classic 8 (Denise Waters and Ruth Maestre) give a "thank you!" to the volunteers as they taxi to Runway 23 at KLAF.



Classic 9 (Deborah Bertram and Jeanne Willerth) on the takeoff roll.



The race is officially started by Dennis Depew, the dean of the College of Technology at Purdue.



Classic 10 on the flyby at Winona. The airport sits in the Mississippi River valley.



Classic 10 readies for the flyby at Shreveport Downtown (KDTN).



On the flyby at KDTN.

## June 20, 2005

Only Gretchen had to get up early this morning — to fly the handicap timing run — but tomorrow morning will be a different story.

She reports back that the run went well. In order to set the handicap, the pilot flies with a race committee member and any "ballast" necessary to take the airplane as close to maximum gross weight as possible. Then a set of four timing runs are flown on cardinal headings at a given pressure altitude. The speed is then averaged and an additional calculation is made to come up with the handicap. Ours went well, and it gave Gretchen a good chance to warm up for the first leg of the race tomorrow after not flying since Thursday.

There's nothing like sitting in briefings all day to make you want to get the heck out of Dodge — but they covered a lot of ground and answered many questions, particularly about the flybys. The mandatory meeting, closed to all but race participants, allowed us to discuss the flyby at each airport in minute detail — how to set up for the timing run, what altitude and track to fly, where the timing line was so that we could cross it wings level to give the timers a good view of our race numbers (block numbers are applied to the airplane's empennage or cowl), and how to enter the traffic pattern after the flyby in order to land and refuel.

Tonight, after a run to the grocery store to collect snacks for the trip, we settle into the room early. We took a first look at the weather picture earlier today, as Tom Carney, a professor of meteorology and a pilot, gave us a weather outlook.

Big in our minds — a low pressure area slowly drooping down from Minnesota and bringing with it a bow echo leaving hurricane-force winds and driving rain in its wake. If the cold front with it goes stationary, we could be in for some waiting and wondering. If the front gets some energy behind it, the wind and rain and storms could drive on through quickly and leave us in the cool and the clear — a much better story, though it would mean tough headwinds on the first leg.



At the next stop, we'll make our takeoff decision ourselves, but at the race start, all the racers start — or not — together based on the weather ahead.

So I download the winds tonight, looking for those drivers, estimating what the winds will be at the various altitudes at which we may fly. But until the sun comes up, we don't quite know what we'll have.

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## June 19, 2005

While flying an air race presents challenges to the pilots, putting on an air race veritably opens a tangle of problems to solve.

The world being the intertwined place that it is means that no event exists in a vacuum. In order to ensure that racing pilots — with their low-level flybys and penchant for flying fast — aren't perceived as a wild bunch of hooligans rousting the countryside, race organizers go through several steps with the FAA, airports, and volunteers before the race begins.

An FAA waiver is required at each airport where racers would make a low-level flyby, because the FAA regulations regarding minimum safe altitudes are "waived" for this to happen. Airport managers and any tower personnel must help construct a safe route for the flyby to take place. And volunteers must be enticed from the GA community to serve as timers and impartial judges during the race.

But a more nebulous and elusive problem ties into one that's familiar to all of us in GA: How do race organizers manage the public perception of the race?

The Air Race Classic brings 40 airplanes and a couple hundred people to the start and terminus of the race, and those same airplanes through each stop on the route. For the 2005 race, organizers knew they had the impact of this cadre of airplanes



and pilots for four-plus days at the start and three days at the end. Any friction caused by the ARC would be remembered by the community and ascribed to "those little airplanes" for years to come. So how to head that off at the pass? Invite the community to come to the race.

Sunday brought the first of several community events hosted by Purdue, a Community Cookout at the airport, including a static display of aircraft and a "meet the racers" booth. Pilots gave Young Eagles flights to a couple dozen kids, and Purdue pilots showed families and friends around their aircraft. It was a fun time and a great way to relax before the "real work" of the race began in earnest.

Ah, yes, more details. On Sunday afternoon, I made roll call for the first-timer's briefing, a mandatory meeting for those of us participating in our first ARC. Ruth Maestre, an air traffic controller from Dayton and past winner of the ARC with partner Denise Waters, led the briefing. From before start to after scoring, Ruth enlightened us on what to expect from the race (without divulging any trade secrets on winning). The tone was fun but serious. After all, racing, like flying in general, holds serious consequences if not executed well.

Today we also met our Baby Birds — a team of first-time racers to whom we are paired for the race. Gretchen and Ruby are the true "Mama Birds," and Ruby spends time talking to the women of Classic 15, Dede Miller and Amy Jayo, about her past experiences in the race.

To close out the weekend, a Takeoff Banquet in one of Purdue's hangars showcased the accomplishments of women pilots throughout the past century, with special honor given to the women present who had been Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) and those who had flown in the Powder Puff Derby (the precursor to the ARC, flown until 1977 when the ARC began).

We head for bed tonight for a good night's sleep, as tomorrow night we'll likely be keyed up for an early start Tuesday.

And what's our handicap going to be? We find out that all-important number to beat tomorrow. We're not the only ones curious: Among others, Classic 28 (Karen Redman and Heidi LaPine) are flying an American Champion Citabria Explorer that also must fly a timing run. Though the Ovation can quickly outrun a Citabria, their experience makes a good illustration why any airplane can win this race — their handicap is also much lower. In fact, Karen and Heidi came in second in the ARC last year.



A Beech Super 18 fires up on the Purdue ramp after flying in for the Community Cookout at the KLAF. It was joined by a P-40 and a P-51 Mustang.



Karen Redman, one half of Classic 28, tries out Purdue's Boeing 727 full-motion flight simulator. The university offered use of the sim to racers on Sunday.



Purdue's 727 sim in motion at the lab.



Ruby Sheldon (Classic 10) and Marge Thayer (Classic 17) regale first-time racers Dede Miller and Amy Jayo of Classic 15 with stories from

previous races. Ruby is a "mama bird" (a veteran racer who advises new racers) to the Classic 15 pilots.



The Takeoff Banquet in one of Purdue's hangars ends with a tribute to the women of the Powder Puff Derby and the Women Airforce Service Pilots, led by the Start/Terminus Committee chairs from Purdue.



Families and friends from the surrounding communities get a chance to tour Purdue's aircraft and equipment, including this Boeing 737.

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## June 18, 2005

For a VFR race, we sure are looking at a lot of charts.

We have Jeppesen airport diagrams, blown up to giant proportions, on which to mark up the flybys that we'll make at each airport. In the room, we prepare our notebooks so that when it comes time for the briefings on Monday, we can quickly refer to each stop.

When you're sending 40 airplanes in quick succession making a low pass at each airport and then returning to land — or if there's enough gas on board and the winds look right, to continue on to the next leg — there are a lot of details to get straight. This is one preflight briefing for which you definitely don't want to go in unprepared.

Earlier in the day, I went out to the airport with Ruby and Gretchen to help out again with the inspection process and to greet incoming racers. Sitting next to Ruby (who has flown 21 Classics) and Marge Thayer (17 Classics) is a trip, because as each team comes through registration, those who have raced before come up to the two of them and greet them warmly. It's like a family reunion, and everybody's glad to see you.

Later in the afternoon, we get a special treat — a four-ship flight of F-18 Hornets has chosen (coincidentally?) Purdue University Airport as a stopover on a mission from South Carolina to Virginia Beach. The Marines do several flybys and a five-second pitchout for the small but enthusiastic crowd and then taxi in. The Purdue ramp staff is fired up and happily brings the Hornets up to the head of the ramp next to the lines of race aircraft. Who knows? The Corps may have scored a recruit or two today.

We didn't fly our timing run for our handicap today, but we'll do so first thing in the morning. Though the calm air of the morning normally makes for smoother flying, we're hoping for some bumps — any turbulence could drop our handicap speed and give us an advantage for the race!



Dottie Anderson and Jean Sloan arrive in Classic 1 from Ohio. This is Dottie's 26th Air Race Classic — and Dottie taught Jean to fly.



A four-ship of F-18 Hornets landed on Saturday afternoon after a hop from South Carolina, giving the Purdue ramp staff something a little bigger to marshal into parking.



Linda Meese and Martha Miller, Classic 21, clean their aircraft while an A&P and volunteer inspect it to ensure that it's airworthy and conforms to type.



The club cars work overtime moving racers and their baggage on the ramp. These volunteers have worked nonstop over the past three days as racers arrive.



The ramp at Purdue, full of Classic aircraft.

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## June 17, 2005

This morning we slept in...til 6:48 a.m. That'll probably be as late as we sleep in during the next week. There's a lot to do to prepare for the race — think of the preflight preparations you make before taking off on a day's flight to the next state. For the race, the teams will cover 2,200-plus nm over the course of — at most — four days. And they'll be working to optimize their groundspeed and the performance they capture from their aircraft. So the details you might cover in a normal preflight magnify — and therefore the racers begin preflight several days in advance.

One of the first steps of the preflight regards aircraft inspection. The aircraft that race must arrive at the start by 11 a.m. on Saturday, almost three days prior to the start of the race. This allows time for the aircraft to undergo a thorough check by A&Ps retained by the Air Race Classic to ensure that the airplanes not only are airworthy, but also that they are not improperly modified.

Classic 10 divided duties for aircraft inspection so that we could both get our airplane checked out and help the race organizers with the process. Gretchen spent the afternoon with the race maintenance technicians going over the logbooks and pilot's operating handbook for N366GJ. Since 6GJ is the 366th Ovation off the production line, and so newly made, the rundown of the airworthiness directive roster went smoothly — most ADs on the model had been complied with as a matter of course on the assembly line. Ah, the benefits of being new! On the other hand (welcome to our litigious society), the required placards on the Ovation span roughly 10 pages of the POH. Each one had to be present and accounted for. But we come through with a clean bill of health.

For others, the result of the inspection is a trip to the shop for a new landing light or some clean spark plugs. Another team searches for a spare ELT. Because the process begins several days before the start, most discrepancies can be rectified.

While Gretchen dealt with our airplane, Ruby and I reported for duty checking static rpm on other airplanes as they came in. An airplane's handicap is based on a variety of factors, including the full throttle (or lowest pitch) propeller setting. A static rpm test determines if the airplane meets its type certification specs or has been blasting past redline without — or with — the pilot's knowledge. To check this, Ruby and I hop into an airplane (with the PIC) and check the rpm using both the ship's tach and a handheld



Ruby Sheldon rides the golf cart out to the static runup area for more testing. She's done this before.

digital tach. We then note the results along with the reported static rpm from the aircraft type data sheet and/or supplements.

In this process we get to meet several of the other pilots — and their airplanes. Some have just landed after two-day trips from Los Angeles and Miami. And some have come in from South Bend, Indiana — less than an hour away. Many have flown the race before, but there are newcomers like me as well. Do they appreciate one last runup before parking? Maybe not the hot start that follows, but it's a square that we need to check off before they depart again on Tuesday.

The inside of Patty Mitchell's Cessna 182 is upholstered in red velour, "like a brothel," she says. But she has it set up just the way she wants it for flying between her ranch in Montana and her husband's work with Gulfstream in Wisconsin. Before she rounded out her career at United, she owned an FBO and captained a Cessna Citation. Though she can still fly for free on United, it takes her longer to make it from Montana to Wisconsin commercially than the 6.5 hours it takes in the Skylane. She's racing this year with longtime race partner Gene Nora Jessen, who was one of the Mercury 13 — the cadre of women who underwent and passed the same astronaut testing in the 1960s as the Mercury 7 astronauts.

All these chores may not sound like the thrilling stuff of blazing through the sky, but they represent just some of the details we cover during our Friday afternoon. When the last racers have flown in for the day, we retire to the hotel and find dinner with a couple of other race teams at a local restaurant. Sitting at the table, we note several business owners, a bank president, a member of the Wichita Flight Standards District Office, an anesthesiologist, and a CFI from Western Michigan University (with its rapidly growing aviation program).

Tomorrow: more inspections, and the flight test that will establish the handicap for Classic 10.



Patty Mitchell starts up her Skylane and points out some highlights in the panel to Ruby.



Ruby leans the mixture to achieve peak rpm for the static rpm test.

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## Racing to the Start — June 16, 2005



Gretchen Jahn, Ruby Sheldon, and Julie Boatman

Gretchen Jahn, Ruby Sheldon, and I are meeting in Kerrville, Texas, to launch toward Indiana for the race. We'd be hard-pressed to compose a more diverse team: Classic 10, as our team is known, matches three women from three generations. We hail from Arizona, Texas, and Maryland. We're a CEO, a retired geological survey pilot, and an editor. We have among us more than 20,000 hours (75 percent of them Ruby's), a respectable roster of certificates and ratings, and three logbooks full of stories. But the facts don't tell you why we're here. Like any other endeavor worth the effort, air racing is far more than the sum of its parts, and the critical glue is the relationships we'll forge and strengthen along the way.

Gretchen and Ruby are pilot and copilot for Classic 10; I'm officially a passenger, but my job is to analyze the weather — and the winds — along the way. What I find determines when we take off on each leg of the race. Most GA pilots make weather go/no-go decisions for themselves, but in the high-intensity atmosphere of an air race, many teams delegate this responsibility to a third party so that the pilots are free to consider other details — and save their energy for flying fast and navigating with precision.

After a careful weight-and-balance calculation and some creative packing, we load all our gear into the Mooney Ovation2, N366GJ. The airplane has less than 100 hours on it and has been expertly waxed and polished; it gleams like an arrow ready to fly. Since Gretchen is the CEO of Mooney, we carry the call sign "Mooney One." We leave Kerrville around 2:30 p.m. Texas time for our two legs north.

This is the first time that the three of us have flown together in this airplane, but we've all flown together before. Gretchen and Ruby raced last year in a Cessna 182RG; Gretchen and I have raced together back when we both lived and flew in Colorado. For our first team flight, we could hardly have hand picked better weather. The first leg to Russellville, Arkansas, requires a small heading change to go around the back side of a cell storming towards Little Rock. We fly through a rain shower on the descent into Russellville — it's enough to unstick part of the race number "10" we have affixed to the vertical stab of the Ovation.

We fuel up at Russellville and check the weather for the trip north. Since it's going from good VFR to unbelievably good VFR, we launch readily. Once we've crossed the Ozarks, the high cloud cover abruptly ends and we fly into the clearest conditions a pilot will ever see in the Midwest. We can practically see Chicago from our track south of St. Louis! (Okay, I'm exaggerating, but it sure feels that way.)

When we call inbound to Lafayette Tower, we don't know it yet but we've alerted the ground crew on the Air Race Ramp. An incredible team of pilots and aviation students from Purdue University has expended Herculean efforts to organize the start and terminus events for the race, and many of them are outside to flag us in as we taxi to our spot on the ramp. In neon green shirts, the ground crew brings out three golf carts for our bags (it's pretty impressive how much stuff we pull out of the airplane) and we're checked in and shuttled to the hotel with great enthusiasm and efficiency.



Preparations for the race start in earnest Friday, with inspections conducted on the airplanes as they arrive. We'll be helping out, and beginning to organize the charts and paperwork we'll need for the race.

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