

2017 Valdez Fly In Review

Approximately 200 airplanes and more than 2,500 hundred people descended on Pioneer Field in Valdez for the 14th Valdez Fly In and Air Show. The 2017 event featured spectacular STOL flying, aerobatics by Scott Sexton and Gary Ward, a demonstration of a WWII era C-46 cargo plane and a world record in the world famous STOL contest.

Frank Knapp of Palmer took advantage of perfect conditions for a STOL flying to set a new world record. Saturday of the contest featured cool temperatures and consistent 13-15 kt westerly sea breeze right down the runway. On his second attempt Knapp made a 14'7" take off and an equally impressive 10'5" landing, both records and for a combined score of 25 feet! The crowd cheered as his plane landed just past the line and the video shows the wheels only making one revolution before coming to a stop. Knapp's yellow light sport Lil' Cub started life as a J-3 and that Frank and his Wife Kris built and then rebuilt with numerous modifications. This year the plane featured a 180hp Lycoming O-320 and special flaps that Knapp designed. Just as important as the plane is the amount of practice Knapp put in, he was at Valdez two weeks early making numerous hops down the runway.

All classes witnessed impressive flying. In the Bush Class the top five planes were only separated by nine total feet in the semi-final. This year the top five planes flew in a final heat where Chris Wyekoff of Wasilla had a take off of 59' and a landing of 80' for a total score of 139' for the win. Wyekoff won a set of 31" Alaskan Bushwheels from Airframes Alaska for his excellent flying.

Tm Hudzinski of Wasilla won the Alternate Bush class in his Backcountry SQ-2 with a take off of 47' and a landing of 28'. Tom's performance earned him a set of Acme Aero Fab Bush Shocks. The heavy Touring Class was won by perennial contestant Wes Erb of Big Lake in his Cessna 180 with a take off of 90' and a landing of 135' for a total score of only 225' for the Sky Wagon. Erb's efforts won him a Spidertracks tracking unit. Mark Hasner of Fairbanks took home a Tanis Engine heater for winning the Light Touring Class in his Cessna 170B with a take off of 75' and landing of 83' for a combined score of 158'. These numbers would have made him competitive in the Bush Class!

The crowd favorite was Lydia Jacobs of Corinth Maine in her Cessna 150. Nineteen year old Jacobs sold most of her belongings, including her car for the gas money needed to fly to Alaska to start her career in aviation. She loaded the remainder of her belongings into her 150 and spent almost 60 hours flying to Alaska. Jacobs had always wanted to compete in Valdez and hopes to be a professional bush pilot. Lydia's take off of 126' feet and 151' landing showed her ability to get all the performance of her 150 that she could. While Jacobs was flying the crowd donated money to offset her gas bill for the trip north. Lydia collected over \$800 and the award for the longest traveled contestant.

While the STOL competition is the signature event for Valdez competitors also participated in a flour bombing competition and a balloon bust event as well. There were numerous demonstrations including Paul Claus demonstrating his mastery of the Turbine Otter with a take off under 100' and several demonstrations by Everts Air Fuel in their 1945 C-46 Hot Stuff. The 35,000 pound freighter had an approximately 500' take off as the rumble of the twin radial engines drowned out all other sound. Scott Sexton performed aerobatics in his Citabria as well as lead a missing man formation for long time Fly In participant and supporter Marc Paine who died in an accident at an air show last summer. Gary Ward flew his MX-2 up from Georgia for the chance to perform in Valdez and amazed the crowd. Ward had never seen such a spectacular venue for aerobatics and used the mountain behind the airport as a canvas for his aerial artistry. The sounds of his plane reverberated as he climbed up one ridge and down the next.

The reach of the Valdez Fly In was demonstrated when the Facebook Live streaming started of the contest. Over 20,000 people watched literally from around the world with visitors from every continent and enthusiastic comments about the performances. Interest has continued with video of Frank Knapp's performance with more than 1 million views.

While the flying provides the entertainment, having a chance to meet and socialize with fellow pilots is what keeps many coming back. Pilots camped with their planes and more who drove in surrounded the airfield as well. Pilots lingered and swapped stories and tips as well. Event organizers are already working on the 2018 event.

For more information on the event visit ValdezFlyIn.com or contact Fly In President Joe Prax at jprax@alaska.net