

The 2015 Vectren Dayton Air Show

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The United States Air Force Thunderbirds F-16C Demonstration Team arrives in formation to the 2015 Dayton Air Show. The Thunderbirds last appearance at Dayton was in 2011. (Mike Heilman)

In a normal year, The Vectren Dayton Ohio Air Show can expect more than 60,000 spectators across the two-day annual event, but 2015 was not a normal year. The show's lineup was set up to produce a record crowd, but the remnants of tropical storm, Bill, played havoc on the attendance. The 41st annual event drew a crowd of 40,000 people. Michael Emoff, Chairman of the U.S. Air & Trade Show Board of Trustees commented, "We are pleased with the number people that attended despite the rain."

Air show organizers had to make adjustments to the grounds and schedules due to heavy rain that moved into the area on Friday and Saturday. The Saturday show is historically the highest attended day of the two-day event, but the heaviest rain moved in the area that morning. The show was delayed several hours before the rain and low overcast moved out. Once conditions improved, there was only time for five of the major acts to perform. The weather on Sunday allowed for the full air show to fly as scheduled.



Major Jason Curtis flies the lead solo, number five for the 2015 team. The lead solo is responsible for the timing of team during the show. This is Major Curtis's third year with the Thunderbirds. (Mike Heilman)

Headliner for the 2015 Dayton show was the United States Air Force Thunderbirds. The Thunderbirds returned in their six F-16C Fighting Falcons to the Dayton area after a four-year absence. Major Jason Curtis, lead solo pilot for the Thunderbirds, describes his role with the team, "As the lead solo, the most challenging aspect of the show is keeping all of the timing elements in place. The Thunderbirds show is a tightly choreographed show, and as number five, I am the timekeeper during our routine. There are three main components of the show: the diamond and the two solos, and between those, three elements keeping all of that in place so that we have something in front of the crowd at all times.

Major Curtis also explained that Thunderbirds were prepared to deal with the bad weather "We have three different shows that we can fly. We fly a high show, a low show, and a flat show. In the flat show, we can go all the way down to 1,500 feet." The Thunderbirds performed on both days; they flew the low show Saturday and the high show on Sunday. The 2015 show marked the first time since 2003 that Dayton had more than one jet team perform. The Breitling Jet Team made its first visit to North America. Dayton was the sixth show on this team's tour. The team is made up of former French military pilots and is based in Dijon, France. The Breitling team is the world's largest professional civilian jet team. The team flies seven L-39C Albatross training jets.

The United States Navy's frontline fighter the F/A-18F Super Hornet East Coast Demonstration Team performed at the Dayton show. The Super Hornet demo team is from VFA-106 training squadron based at Naval Air Station Oceana, Va. The U.S. Coast Guard performed a simulated search and water rescue at the 2015 show. The four-person HH-65 Dolphin Helicopter and crew were from Coast Guard Station, Detroit. The United States Army Black Parachute Team made several jumps on Sunday only, Saturday's jump were canceled due to the low ceiling.



Sean D Tucker uses an Extra 300 to provide media and an opportunity for young people to get their first flight Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA's) Young Eagles program at each air show site. The Extra 300 was also on static display. (Mike Heilman)

Headlining the civilian portion of the show was air show legend, Sean D Tucker. The 2008 Aviation Hall of Fame inductee performed his high-energy show in his custom-built Oracle

Challenger III. Tucker has won every air show award possible, and he describes how he has designed his award winning air show routine, "Designing an air show takes a lifetime. I have almost 25,000 hours of flight time. I practice 700 times a year in the low-level environment to place every aircraft maneuver exactly, so it can be choreographed to inspire and thrill but also be safe."

Tucker also added, "You want to push your boundaries, but you don't want to step on the dangerous side either. It takes time to have confidence in your abilities and the aircraft's capabilities, so you can do it righteously. It just takes a long time. I have never been perfect, but I have been excellent. We are still going for perfect."

The passion for flying takes hard work according to Tucker, "It is an awful lot of work. It's a huge commitment. It's a lifetime's journey. Air show flying has defined my life. I love it, I sleep it, and it's in my DNA, but if you are going to be good at it, you have to work hard. I love the opportunity to be the best I can be, and I like that it's hard. My commitment to excellence in the sky is knowing that it's a privilege and not a right. I love sharing the magic of flight. I am just honoring the Wright brothers; they were the big dreamers."



Third generation aviator Matt Younkin sets in the door of his Twin Beech 18 at the 2015 Dayton Air Show. It was Younkin's first appearance at the Dayton show. (Mike Heilman)

Matt Younkin made his first appearance at the 2015 Dayton show, but it was his Twin Beech 18 aircraft's second appearance. Bobby Younkin performed at the 1992 Dayton air show in the Beech 18. "I am a third generation aviator. My grandpa and his two brothers were aviators. My dad was an air show pilot before me. Aviation is in my blood. It is all I have ever known. I grew up with it, and it is my passion. I live to fly, and I have loved airplanes since I was a little kid," explains Younkin.

Younkin tragically lost his father and sister in air show accidents, but he explains why he keeps performing, "Life is an adventure, and you have to keep going. There are a lot of ups and downs. I rely on my faith to keep going day to day. It is father's day weekend, and I have my 86-year-old grandpa and my five-year-old daughter here with me this weekend. Both of them are going to watch me perform, and to share that experience with them is a privilege. There are so many highs in life, and that is what we need to focus on."

The Twin Beech 18 used in Younkin's show was built in 1943 as an Army trainer. Younkin comments that the Beech 18 was not built for air show aerobatics, "The air show maneuvers we will do in this plane are not what Walter Beech intended the plane to do when he gave the go ahead to build this aircraft. This aircraft was the Lear Jet of the 1940s."



The Jet Waco, nicknamed "Screamin Sasquatch" is one of the most unique acts on the air show circuit. The Waco has both a radial and jet engine, allowing the pilot Jeff Boerboon to perform maneuvers a normal Waco can't do. (Mike Heilman)

One of most unique airplanes on the air show circuit made its first appearance at the Dayton air show, the Jet Waco. The Waco known as *Screamin Sasquatch* has two power plants. The Waco is a 1929 Taperwing Waco body with a Pratt and Whitney Radial engine and a J85 jet engine that produces 3,000 lbs of thrust. The jet engine triples the amount of power and allows demonstration pilot, Jeff Boerboon, the ability to perform maneuvers that a normal Waco cannot do.

In World War II, the North American B-25 "Mitchell" was the most produced twin-engine medium bomber with nearly 10,000 built. The B-25 became famous for the 1942 Doolittle raid on Tokyo. The B-25J mission during the war was to drop bombs. Today's mission is to bring public awareness to the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). The iconic bomber was on display and flew in Sunday's show at Dayton.

The B-25J that flew at Dayton was restored by owner, Larry Kelly, to *Panchito*, which was named after the rooster in the Disney movie, *The Three Caballeros*. The original Panchito served in the 396th Bomber Squadron, 41st Bomb Group, and the 7th Air Force stationed in the Central Pacific. The current crew of *Panchito* honored retired U.S. Marine and disabled veteran, Vince Dec, at the Dayton show for his service and work with the DAV organization. This is the 13th air show season that the DAV outreach program has been operating.

Heavy rains on Friday prevented several scheduled static aircraft from attending the Dayton show. Highlighting the military displays was the C-17 from 445th Airlift Wing Station at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton and a KC-135R from the 121st Air Refueling based at Rickenbacker ANG base in Columbus, Ohio. There were two Army UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters on display.



A C-17 from the 445th Airlift Wing, stationed at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton was on static display at the 2015 air show. (Mike Heilman)

Highlighting the civilian static aircraft display was the Curtiss C-46 Commando cargo plane. The C-46 was designed as civilian airliner but was used as transport for the military during World War II. The Commando became famous for flying the Hump, a dangerous supply mission over the Himalayas during the war. The Air Heritage Museum in Beaver Falls, Penn. provided a C-123K "Provider" for static display. The twin engine Fairchild built C-123K was used extensively in the Vietnam War. Draken International based out of Lakeland, Fla. sent two A-4K Skyhawks for static display. Draken is a privately owned company that provides airborne adversary support to the United States military and other countries.

The weather may have kept the attendance down at the 2015 show, but it did not dampen the spirits of one of the air show greats, Sean D Tucker, "I have made well over 20 appearances at Dayton. I love coming back to the history of Dayton. It is an iconic show, and it's the birthplace of aviation. We need to keep this show as an iconic figure because it is the home of the Wright brothers."