

2007 Harold Neumann Barnstormer Recap

On September 1st, in preparation for this year's Harold Neumann Barnstormer, Paul Thomson, Lee Crites, Ron Albertson, Shawn Stelter, and Steve Faulkner made their way through the tall weeds and bugs of New Century's infield to place the fabric panel box markers. The box location was established ahead of time using Google Earth and was adjusted south and west from past year's locations. This new location allows for easy access by the corner judges via the airport's perimeter road without crossing any controlled movement areas.

Along with the new box location, the judging location was also moved to New Century's west ramp (near the Executive Beechcraft hanger) and the primary axis of the box was changed to north/south. Again, this location provides access to the judging line without crossing any controlled areas and minimizes the potential for aircraft flying west of the 18/36 runway centerline.

To give the new location a test, a critique and practice session was held on September 3rd. John Wittenborn in his Pitts S2B started things off by flying the Primary sequence while Paul Thomson and John Ostmeyer provided feedback from the ground. John's flight was followed by flights from Steve Faulkner, Lee Crites, Dave Main, John Ostmeyer and Paul Thomson. John Morrissey also arrived in his beautiful Luscombe 8A to get a look at the new box and provide some help to the contest hopefuls. The one excitement for the day came when Lee reported a fuel leak as he was inverted during a half-Cuban. He landed without incident and found the culprit to be a less-than-tight-enough gas cap on his main fuel tank. The cap was properly tightened and Lee was quickly back in the air demonstrating his flawless figures.

Registration day for the contest began with low clouds, rain and thunderstorms over much of Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. By lunch time the chapter volunteers had all the preparations completed and were just waiting for the clouds to lift. About this same time the first out of town pilot arrived. Jamie Treat from IAC 5 in Colorado flew his Pitts S1S to compete in the Intermediate category. His arrival was quickly followed by Tom Rybarczyk from IAC 119 in Wichita and Giles Henderson from IAC 61 in central Illinois. Connie Johnson and Michelle Wittenborn saw to it everyone completed the proper paperwork and made the appropriate financial contribution to the chapter before being allowed to practice in the box.

By the end of the day, 10 out of town pilots had managed to navigate their way through the weather and park on the Executive Beechcraft ramp. The clouds also cooperated and the first practice flights of the day started about 4 pm and continued till sunset. With most of the competitors now registered, Tom Richards and Shawn Stelter set to work on the registrar duties and had all the clipboards ready for the next two sets of flights before anyone headed for bed.

Friday morning we finished the late arrival registrations and we got underway with the pilot briefing as scheduled at 9 am. The weather was cooperating and all 19 pilots were

ready for some action. With the briefing completed everyone headed out for their respective jobs and we got ready to launch the first competitor into the box. But Mother Nature had other plans. Even though the ASOS was reporting clear, the first pilot flying the low lines reported clouds in the box, and we were forced to recall everyone and stand down to wait for suitable conditions.

As the day warmed, the low cumulus which had prevented us from starting on time finally lifted, and we launched airplanes into the box beginning at 2:30 pm. The 4 Intermediate pilots were the first up and completed their known sequences without incident. The 6 Sportsman pilots flew second and were able to continue the smooth flow of airplanes through the box. Following a short break and judging line change, the 9 Primary pilots took to the sky and did their best to impress the judges. The judging duties were anchored by Chief Judge Greg Shetterly and line judges John Morrissey, Lee Crites, and Jeff Hotzel along with several judges who were also flying in the contest. They were supported and assisted by many of the chapter volunteers including Shawn Stelter, Jill English, Linda Morrissey, Matt Wilk and Brenda Lea.

The flights continued all afternoon in quick succession and by 6 pm we had completed two rounds of flights for the Intermediate and Sportsman pilots and one flight for the Primary pilots. As evening approached the airplanes were all tucked into their hangers and the pilots and volunteers sat down to enjoy the wonderful BBQ coordinated by John and Bev Wittenborn.

Saturday morning welcomed the group with light winds, cool temperatures and a high overcast filtering the rising sun for the judges. Since the previous day's process of getting airplanes to and from the box had gone very smoothly, the pilot briefing was short and pilots were quickly moving airplanes to the flight line while Nan Funkhouser (Volunteer Coordinator) persuaded the volunteers and judges to move to their respective positions. The Primary pilots led the way and a decision was made to shorten the turn around times by having each pilot fly both of their remaining sequences during the same flight.

The plan was to have a Primary pilot fly their 'free' sequence then climb and return to the southeast hold while another pilot flew in the box. Then the first pilot would fly their 'unknown' sequence and then land. Since we had at least three airplanes with slow climb rates, the technique would save time and would end up paying dividends later in the day. When a thin layer of clouds was reported in the box by the first Primary competitor with more clouds on the way, the Starters increased the rate of launching airplanes and tried to keep both holding areas occupied to quickly move through the first group of the morning.

Intermediate and Sportsman were up next for their 'unknown' sequences. Both groups had several pilots still in contention for the top spots and the morning's sequences proved to be the best flight of the contest for several of the pilots. By noon, all competition flights were over and the results rested in the hands of the score room volunteers to finish

their work. Connie Johnson and Michelle Wittenborn did a tremendous job getting all the scores entered, verified and published all weekend long.

When all the numbers were tallied and the results known, the Primary group turned out to have the closest finish. Giles Henderson (89.34%) finished just ahead of relative new comer Aaron McCartan (89.07%) and John Wittenborn (84.25%) to win the Primary competition.

The Sportsman group was also very competitive, with the gap from first to third being less than 1%. Paul Thomson (87.94%) edged out John Owens (87.60%) and John Ostmeyer (87.13%) to win the category.

For the Intermediate pilots, Bill Denton (85.50%) finished ahead of Jamie Treat (82.54%) and Tom Rybarczyk (77.95%) to win the category.

We also had three first time competitors flying who deserve special recognition. Ron Albertson, Rod Flinn and Diana Richards took the plunge and competed in Primary for their first contest. All did a great job flying in the "box," none zeroed a figure and all kept their flying *mostly* in front of the judges.

Following the awards ceremony, we drew two names from the long list of non-flying volunteers and gave them rides in the Super Decathlon and Pitts S2B. It was during these rides the low cumulus clouds returned and would have stopped the competition flying if we had not flown the Primary group as we did. At the end of three long days, the competitors headed for home and several folks worked to load up Nan's trailer and pickup with the contest supplies for safe storage until next year's contest.

Thanks again to all the pilots and volunteers who helped pull off this contest, especially Grant Wittenborn for all his help in the months leading up to the contest. We look forward to seeing you all again next year!

Paul
'07 Contest Director

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