



*A History of
Canadian Aerobatics*

**Celebrating fifty years of
Aerobatics Canada**



Jay Hunt 2024

**In commemoration of
the fiftieth anniversary of Aerobatics Canada**

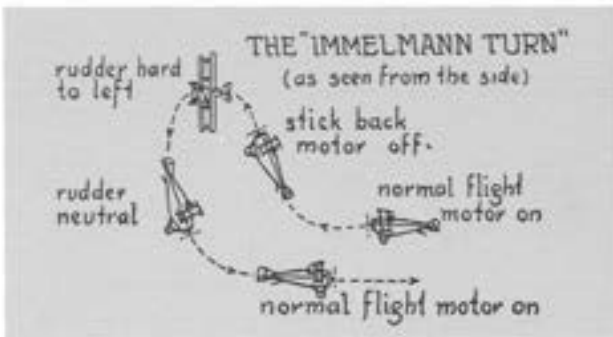
this story is dedicated to
all the selfless volunteers who work tirelessly
on the ground behind the scenes
to make the sport of aerobatics possible.

Table of Contents

The Dawn of Aerobatics	4
Aerobatics in Europe.....	7
The Experimental Aircraft Association	8
The International Aerobatic Club	9
Aerobatic Competition in Canada.....	10
Civilian Formation Aerobatic Teams.....	12
Aerobatics Canada	13
1976 World Aerobatic Championship	14
The 1980 World Aerobatic Championships in the USA	15
1980s - The Golden Age of Aerobatics Canada	16
Two new all Canadian airplane designs	16
Aerobatic Instructors Rating	17
The 1988 World Aerobatic Championships come to Canada.....	18
The 1990s and Beyond.....	19
Canadians at other World Aerobatic Championships	20
Future of Canadian Aerobatics	23

The Dawn of Aerobatics

Since the first flight of the Wright Brothers in 1903, man has dreamed of being free to fly in three dimensions like the birds. Before World War 1 attempts at unusual flight maneuvers were few and far between. Mostly they were attempts by exhibition flyers or barnstormers to attract crowds by performing steep climbs and dives and banked spiral dives. The first 'loop the loop' is said to have been performed by Russian Lt. Peter Nesterov in August 1913. Early French pioneer aviator Celestin-Adolphe Pegoud was also an early aerobatic performer, demonstrating many unusual maneuvers including a vertical S from the top. His first full loop is reported to have been performed in September 1913, not long after Nesterov. Dutchman Anthony Fokker, who went on to produce successful warplanes for Germany, was also an early aerobatic performer. Another early performer in England was Harry Hawker who pioneered repeatable successful recovery from tailspins which, at the time, were killing many aviators. Early American air show performer, Lincoln Beachey is said to have performed the first loop in North America in November 1913.



The outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 put such civilian aviation antics on hold, but the experience gained by the early pioneers was quickly taught to and applied by military aviators on both sides of the conflict. Aerial dog fighting led to rapid advancements in flight theory as pilots learned to fly their mounts to the edges of their capability. Successful combat figures were given names such as the Immelman Turn, a half loop half roll figure inaccurately attributed to German pilot Max Immelman. In fact, he never used this figure in combat, instead using a steep climbing,

rolling and descending turn the French named a 'Chandelle' that we know today as a wingover. As more pilots learned how to recover successfully from a spin, it also became a popular escape maneuver. Other figures developed during wartime dogfights were the push over into a half loop (English bunt), barrel roll, half roll half loop (split S) and the stall turn (hammerhead).

When the war ended, many fighting pilots found themselves without gainful employment. The skills they had learned in combat were of little use in civilian life and were considered daredevil activities like wing-walking, parachute jumping and other pointless and dangerous stunts. However, surplus military aircraft were cheap and plentiful and were snapped up by intrepid aviators, keen on showing the world what they had done in the war. In England, Europe and North America, 'flying circuses' demonstrating simulated dog fights, aerobatics and other death-defying feats began making the circuit of country fairs, barn raisings and anywhere else they could attract a crowd of 'rubes' to relieve them of their hard-earned cash. Flying was new and exciting to most people so all a pilot had to do was fly over a town, perform a few stunts and land in a nearby field. Soon people would flock to the field to watch him fly and perhaps pay a few dollars for a brief ride in the plane. Thus, the age of barnstorming was born.



Eileen Vollick

In 1928, Eileen Vollick became the first licensed Canadian woman pilot. Soon after she joined a flying circus and began performing aerobatics throughout in Canada and the United States.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, air shows and the related sport of air racing became popular spectator activities. Air shows and air races moved away from being incidental adjuncts to other activities, becoming separate events in their own right. Aerobatic demonstrations became a popular part of these events. Pilots became recognizable celebrities and their planes readily identified by their garish paint schemes. Air show performers competed among themselves, each previously unseen stunt. The general public continued to be enthralled by air show



Al William's Gulf Hawk air show plane - 1938

performances, and many a student pilot (this one included) was drawn to aviation by the desire to emulate their air heroes. A few were lucky enough to gain access to a training plane capable of aerobatics and to find an independent instructor willing to teach them.

Following WWII in the US, barnstorming and air shows resumed much as they had been before the war. The main difference was that while surplus fighter aircraft were still relatively inexpensive, their operating costs were prohibitive. Flying circuses and individual air show

performers continued to use their pre-war mounts or more affordable trainers like the Piper J3 Cub, Stearman PT-17 or North American AT-6. Only well-heeled air racers, supported by lucrative sponsors, were able to afford high performance airplanes and air racing became a popular spectator sport with major events held annually in Miami Florida, Reno, Nevada and Cleveland, Ohio.

This resurgence in air event popularity came to a tragic end in September 1949 at the Cleveland National Air Race when a contestant flying a P-51 Mustang crashed into a house, killing himself and its two occupants. Governments stepped in and imposed strict regulations on flying displays of all kinds and aerobatics was heavily restricted. Regulations developed to control civil aviation were intended to suppress the desire to do aerobatics. The many flying schools across the United States and Canada turned their focus to training pilots for commercial aviation, not flying for fun, and they did their best to suppress any desire to learn aerobatics. Stunt flying, as it was called, had no place in the development of commercial aviation.

Students were not taught to loop or roll. Instead, they were taught how to avoid any abrupt or aggressive maneuvers which might bring them close to a stall or spin. They taught things like recognition and avoidance of incipient spins, in order to keep pilots away from the risk of danger. A whole generation of pilots grew up not understanding what a spin was and how to recover from one. The theory was that if a pilot didn't fly close to the edges of the approved flight envelope of an aircraft, it wouldn't spin and they would escape certain death. New training planes were developed without the strength or capability to perform aerobatics that had been a feature of many earlier trainers. This situation continued throughout the 1950s. Outside of military training and a few commercial air shows aerobatics was virtually unknown.

In Canada, the civilian aviation environment closely paralleled that in the United States. Between the wars, civilian flying schools were formed for the purpose of turning out pilots to develop the north, as commercial airline pilots, and as future air force pilots. In 1930, flying clubs were organized into the Canadian Flying Clubs Association, later to become the Royal Canadian Flying Clubs Association (RCFCA). Its purpose was to bring the various local clubs together as a common voice advocating for civil aviation. The Association received some government funding and used it to sponsor programs like a touring summer air show known as the Trans-Canada Air Pageants which featured many aerobatic performances, including those of the air forces first formal aerobatic team, the RCAF Siskins. From the end of WWII until the early 1960s shows like this, along with RCAF base open houses and commercial displays like the Canadian International Air Show, which has been held in Toronto, Ontario every year since 1946, and the Abbotsford BC air show. They were about the only times Canadians got to see aerobatic performances until the start of the 1960s.

Civilian air show performers at these events were usually visitors from the United States. There were very few civilians flying aerobatics in Canada at the time and most of these were former RCAF pilots. Occasionally, a Canadian civilian pilot would appear at these shows demonstrating loops and rolls in a surplus military airplane but these performances were few and far between.



Harald Wanamaker's Chipmunk crash

He died tragically during a photography flight in his black DeHavilland Chipmunk. According to the accident report, the photographer dropped his camera during an aerobatic maneuver and it jammed in the rudder pedals making recovery impossible. It crashed in a field north of Oshawa, Ontario in January 1971 and both Harold and the photographer were killed.

One early Canadian aerobatic performer was Ross Harold Wanamaker. Harold was born near Trenton, Ontario, May 25, 1920. Little is known of his early life and flying experiences. He was an instructor at the Oshawa Flying club from the 1950s until his death in 1971. He could be seen in aerobatic performances in his military surplus North American Harvard at local air shows throughout the 1960s.



Sally Wagner

From the mid-1950s until the 1970s, one of the most recognizable Canadian civilian air show performers was Sally Wagner. She looked stunning with silver hair and a matching silver flight suit flying aerobatics in her polished silver, surplus De Havilland Chipmunk,

In 1941, Sally became the 91st Canadian female to receive a private pilot's licence at the age of 27. She became the 20th woman in Canada to receive a commercial licence in 1945 and later was the 10th Canadian to receive an instructor's rating. Sally helped Marion Orr, a well-known WWII ferry pilot, establish the Maple Flying Club at the airport in Maple, Ontario.

Sally also died tragically in a crash of her airplane on May 22, 1971, not far from where Harold Wanamaker was killed.

Until the Champion model 7ECA Citabria, a derivative of the postwar Aeronca Champ two seat trainer, entered production in 1964, no civilian aircraft design was certified for aerobatics in Canada. The arrival of this relatively inexpensive airplane on the market opened up the thrill of aerobatic training to a whole new generation of student pilots. Paul Ramsberger, an instructor from the Toronto area was one of the first Canadians to demonstrate this airplane in local air shows.

Aerobatics in Europe

Things were somewhat different in Europe. In 1905, the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) had been formed to govern aviation records. It's membership was comprised of representatives of each country's national aero club. The American club was the National Aeronautic Association (NAA), and Canada's was the Royal Canadian Flying Clubs Association (RCFCA). These clubs were responsible for all international record attempts and national contests.

Following the end of the war, informal aerobatic contests were often held between European countries with national teams frequently sponsored by their country's military. With the advent of the cold war, winning at these contests became a source of national pride and much competition took place between NATO and communist bloc countries. In response, the FAI set up the International Aerobatics Commission (CIVA) to govern international aerobatic competitions. The national aero club of each country in turn delegated authority for aerobatics to its national aerobatic club. In the case of the USA this was the Aerobatic Club of America (ACA). In 1981, it was moved to the International Aerobatic Club (IAC) division of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA).



Ladislav Bezak with his family in his Zlin 526

Recognizing the interest in international competition in Europe and overseas, CIVA organized the first World Aerobatic Championships (WAC) to be held in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia in 1960. The national aero clubs of countries were invited to submit teams to this competition. Frank Price of the USA was the only North American pilot to participate in this event. Ladislav Bezak of Czechoslovakia became the first World Aerobatic Champion flying a Zlin airplane. He is credited with introducing the Lomcevak, a gyroscopic tumbling aerobatic maneuver. He would later flee from the Communist bloc with his wife and four small children in his Zlin 526 airplane. In 1980 Canadian aerobatic pilot Gordon Price sponsored Ladi to emigrate to Canada where he went on to coach the 1980 Canadian Aerobatic Team.

At the 1960 WAC it became apparent that a uniform system was needed for depicting a sequence of aerobatic figures on paper and standards for judging them. Previously several methods had been in use. Spaniard José Luis de Aresti Aguirre had developed a system for depicting his maneuvers on paper. Over 3,000 figures were depicted by individual symbols and a difficulty factor was attached to each figure. This made it possible to construct a sequence of a specified total difficulty and provided a framework for judging performances. It was being used at contests in Spain and after much debate, CIVA decided to adopt Aresti's system in time for use at the 1964 WAC. WACs have been held around the world nearly every two years since 1960. The FAI recognized the RCFCA as Canada's national aero club, but it would be years before Canada was ready to submit an entry.

The Experimental Aircraft Association

In the 1950s, things began to change with the arrival of homebuilt aircraft. Following World War 2, surplus aircraft and aircraft parts and materials again flooded the surplus market. Unlike after the first war, surplus military airplanes were, for the most part, financially out of reach to most aviation enthusiasts. Since before the war, there had been a small group of enthusiasts designing, building and flying homemade aircraft using surplus military parts and off-the-shelf materials. Many of these aircraft were deemed to be strong enough to perform aerobatics and this opened up a new realm of recreational flying.

In January 1953 veteran pilot Paul Poberezny and a small group of enthusiasts created the Experimental Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association in his basement. Its purpose was to share information among homebuilders on aircraft designs and best construction techniques and to represent the community to US regulating authorities. It soon became known as the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) and gradually grew to become the largest sport aviation organization in the world, encompassing many forms of recreational aviation



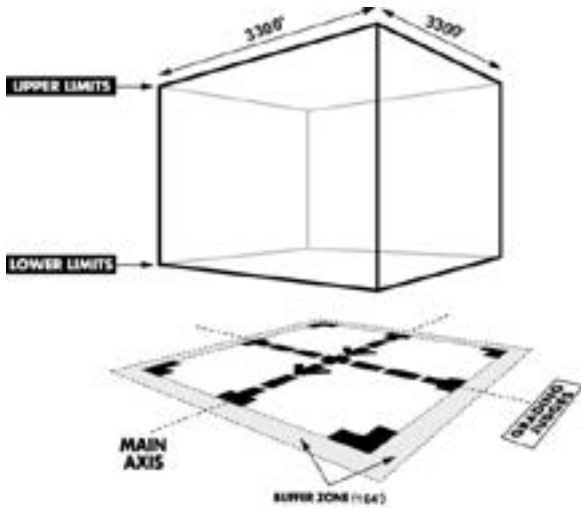
Hoppy Hopkinson in his Stitts Playboy homebuilt airplane

Canada (EAAC) under its new president Herb Cunningham. Hoppy's airplane is now in the reserve hangar at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa, Ontario.

The father of Canada's postwar homebuilt movement was Keith "Hoppy" Hopkinson. He served during WWII as a pilot instructor in the Royal Canadian Air Force at No 12 Elementary Flying Training School, at Sky Harbour, Goderich, Ontario and operated an aviation business there following the war. In 1954, he built an SA-3 Playboy homebuilt aircraft, using surplus parts from other aircraft. In January 1956 it received the first Canadian flight permit for a homebuilt aircraft. In 1955 Hoppy founded the Ultra-Light Aircraft Association of Canada (ULAAC). Many Canadian homebuilders had joined the EAA and had organized into chapters across the country. Following Hoppy's death in an airplane crash in 1964, ULAAC was transformed into the Experimental Aircraft Association of

The International Aerobatic Club

In 1970 a separate division of EAA, the International Aerobatic Club (IAC) was formed to promote aerobatics through an organized competitive system of advancing levels of difficulty. IAC would govern the sport of competition aerobatics in the USA, closely following the rules followed by CIVA competitions in Europe. IAC has grown to be the world's largest aerobatic organization. Whereas European aerobatic competitions had no class structure IAC contests were organized into four classes based on aircraft performance and pilot's abilities. IAC established a system of local chapters modeled after those of EAA. They established a set of rules to govern competitive aerobatics and in 1972 began hosting local contests across the USA and in Canada.



Competition Aerobatic Box

a compulsory, a free program made up from a published catalog of allowable figures, and an unknown which is given to them during the contest and that they must fly without previous practice. They are judged by a panel of judges observing from the ground in a manner similar to that of figure skating or gymnastics. Each figure is scored out of 10. A perfect figure is given a 10 and a point reduction is given for each error or inaccuracy to produce a grade for each figure. Additional penalties are assessed for each violation of the box boundaries. The sum of all figure grades, plus an additional grade for the overall flow and appearance of the sequence, results in a final sequence score. Schools are held annually to train judges who may or may not also be competitive pilots. At the end of each flying season, the IAC hosts a national championship which leads to the selection of teams to enter international competition.

An aerobatic program or 'sequence' consists of a series of linked individual aerobatic figures which must be flown within the confines of a 1000 meter cube of airspace that is marked out on the ground. Pilots compete as individuals flying three programs,



Carole Holyk

Canadians began attending these judging schools and taking part in IAC contests. The intention was for Canada to build up a competition system using the same rules as IAC with the goal of eventually entering Canadian pilots to international competitions.

Carole Holyk, who herself is not a pilot, became interested in aerobatics in the 1970s and became Canada's longest serving aerobatic judge. She has served as chief judge at contests in Canada and the United States and has taught schools to train other judges. She served for many years as Canada's representative to CIVA, the aerobatic arm of the FAI, including as the CIVA Secretary.

Aerobatic Competition in Canada

Recreational aerobatics began to emerge in Canada in the late 1960s. The arrival of the Bellanca Citabria airplane in 1964 made aerobatic instruction more accessible and affordable at local flying clubs. The growth of the homebuilt aircraft movement under EAAC led to the appearance of a new breed of aircraft capable of aerobatics. The popularity in the United States of the Pitts Special biplane, designed in 1942 by Curtis Pitts led to several Canadians to begin building them. Even though it was not legal to fly aerobatics in homebuilt aircraft in Canada, they were still fun and challenging to fly. Under EAAC's guidance, a number of Pitts Specials and similarly capable homebuilts were completed and pockets of aerobatic enthusiasts arose at small airports across Canada.

On April 20, 1969, EAAC sponsored the first aerobatic contest ever held in Canada at Peterborough, Ontario using the same contest rules as in the USA.

At the time, the only Canadian aircraft in which it was legal to fly aerobatics were surplus military trainers like the DeHavilland Chipmunk or North American Harvard or the primary trainer Bellanca Citabria. Although US registered aircraft like the Pitts Special could come to Canada and fly in our air shows, Canadians could not do the same because Canadian homebuilt aircraft were not approved for aerobatics. As a result, this contest was limited to those three aircraft types with Doug Murray and Paul Ramsperger flying a Citabria, silver haired Sally Wagner in a matching silver flight suit flying a silver Chipmunk, and Harold Wanamaker flying a Harvard. An American was allowed to demonstrate aerobatics in his Pitts Special but Gerry Younger of Guelph could only watch because his Pitts was not approved by the Canadian Department of Transport (DOT) for aerobatics.

EAAC was determined to get popular homebuilt aerobatic aircraft approved in Canada. To this end, they enlisted several test pilots with National Aeronautical Establishment of the Canadian National Research Council as an EAA Technical Committee to satisfy Department of Transport requirements for aerobatic approval for homebuilt designs. Under the leadership of Ted Slack, they undertook the daunting challenge of providing a complete stress analysis of the Pitts Special design required by the DOT, in order to obtain the necessary approval. Deryck Hickox loaned his Pitts Special CF-XTT to them for flight testing and it became the first one to be approved for aerobatics in Canada. Gerry Younger's Pitts was approved soon after followed by several others. At EAA Canada's second contest in 1970, Gerry was able to compete in his Pitts for the first time. Things were beginning to look up for Canadian aerobatic competition.

From the beginning, the International Aerobatic Club in the USA was instrumental in supporting the development of sport aerobatics in Canada. IAC rules and judging standards were adopted for Canadian contests. Canadians attended IAC judging schools and participated in IAC contests in the US. Many Canadians attended the largest, annual IAC contest at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. It later moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, home of the Experimental Aircraft Association and the world's largest annual fly-in.

The first two aerobatic clubs formed in Canada were IAC Chapter 4 in Toronto and IAC Chapter 18 in Vancouver. These became the nuclei of aerobatic activity which would eventually lead to the development of a Canadian national organization able to enter international competitions.

Many well-known IAC competitors came to Canadian contests, sharing their knowledge and experience and assisting in contest organization and judging. The support Canada received from Bob and Mike Heuer, Tom Poberezny, Gene Soucy, Charlie Hillard, Duane Cole, Jim Lacey, Sam Burgess, Henry Haigh and many others was indispensable to the growth of Canadian aerobatics. The more experienced American visitors usually outclassed the relative newcomer Canadians taking home most of the trophies, particularly in the higher categories but their encouragement and support allowed the Canadians to develop quickly.

In 1972, under the umbrella of EAAC a group of aerobatic pilots at Buttonville Airport north of Toronto banded together to form Chapter 4 of the IAC. Doug Murray was its first president. Initial members included Bob Arend, Dr. Josh Rogers, Frank Jenkinson, Cal Martin, Jay Hunt and Paul Ramsberger. Bob Arend had a Harvard which he flew in air shows as well as a Pitts Special. Doug, Josh, Frank and Cal shared ownership of a Pitts Special S1C. Paul, an instructor at Toronto Airways flew a Citabria.

At around the same time, another group in western Canada including Ed Stacey, Frank Stevens, and Tony Swain formed IAC Chapter 18 at Delta Airpark BC not far from Vancouver. With support from neighbouring IAC chapters in the Pacific Northwest, these intrepid aviators formed the nucleus of western Canadian aerobatics.

These two IAC chapters became the primary Canadian centres of aerobatic activity organizing several contests annually. They were supported by other smaller regional groups that helped spread the sport of aerobatics across the country.

An hour's drive west of Toronto at Kitchener-Waterloo airport Gerry Younger continued to fly his Pitts Special and enter IAC competitions. He had started aerobatics earlier and was always just slightly ahead of the rest of the competitors. He was popular flying nearby air shows in his Pitts with 'Canada' painted on the top wing, and his show commentator had anointed him 'The King of Canadian Aerobatics'. A small group of aerobatic enthusiasts developed around him in southwestern Ontario. In 1973 Gerry became the first Canadian to enter the unlimited category at an IAC contest in the US. His goal was to be the first Canadian to participate in the 1974 World Aerobatic Championships.

At an airport near Montreal, a small group of aerobatic enthusiasts led by Roger Ricard and Francoise Duquette were early Quebec aerobatic competitors.

EAAC continued to organize local contests in Ontario and Quebec. The former air force base at Centralia, Ontario became the site for a regular spring training weekend held on each Victoria Day holiday. Through the summers, airports at Peterborough, Goderich, Lindsay, and Orillia, in Ontario and at St. Jean, St. Jovite and St. Lazare in Quebec hosted regular contests.

Civilian Formation Aerobatic Teams

During the 1970 and 80s several civilian formation aerobatic teams were formed and performed at air shows across Canada.

The original Canadian Reds consisted of Don Farion and Bill Cowan flying red Pitts Special homebuilt aircraft out of Delta airport BC. From about 1973 through 1976, they flew at air shows throughout western Canada.

In 1974 the Carling O'Keefe Brewing Company formed The Red Cap aerobatic team. It consisted of five factory-built Pitts S-2A aircraft. Its leader was Manx Kelly who was recruited from the Rothman's Aerobatic Team in England. He was joined by US aerobatic performer Debbie Gary, Stephan Karwowski, a former Royal Air Force demonstration aerobatic pilot and former Royal Canadian Air Force pilot Mike O'Hanlon from North Battleford, Saskatchewan. The fifth, reserve pilot was Nick Daniel, also formerly of the Rothman Aerobatic Team. He also served as team manager and commentator. Their five Pitts S-2As were based at Buttonville, Ontario. The Red Cap team flew at air shows throughout Ontario and Quebec throughout 1974.



Carling Aerobatic team

This was very advantageous to the local competitors as it brought visibility to the sport and they were able to benefit from their experience. Sadly, their contract was not renewed for 1975, the team was disbanded and the aircraft sold. During the summer of 1976, Jay Hunt used one of the Carling aircraft, mounted with a 16mm Bolex camera, to fly a series of aerobatic sequences for a short film called *Vertical Roll* made by Canadian film producer Bill Reeve. It was shown frequently, as filler between feature films, on the newly introduced Canadian pay TV channel.



RayBan Golds Aerobatic Team

In 1975, two of the Pitts aircraft were purchased by Bill Cowan and Rod Ellis who reformed the Canadian Reds aerobatic team. They flew air shows for several years sponsored by Skill Tools and Bausch & Lomb.

In 1983, the Ray Ban sunglass company became their sponsor. The planes were repainted in a distinctive black and gold and became known as the Ray Ban Golds. Bill and Rod were joined by CP Air pilot George Kirbyson and Air Canada pilot Al Hauff to form a four man team. They continued to perform across North America into the 1990s. The last surviving airplane CF-AMR was donated to the Canada Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa, Ontario in

2002 and remains part of their permanent collection.



Northern Lights Aerobatic Team

In 1994 two former Snowbirds pilots, Andre Lortie and Mario Hamel formed the Northern Lights Aerobatic Team flying five Extra 300 aircraft. The team performed more than 450 shows in Canada, the USA and other countries. It was disbanded in 1999.

Mario later went on to form the Northern Stars Aero Team that, in 2024, are still performing formation aerobatics in Pitts S-2Bs.

Aerobatics Canada

As the Canadian pilot's skills and airplanes advanced and they heard of the experiences the Americans had attending WACs in Europe, Canadian pilots' thoughts turned to the day when they could take part in a world event. In order to participate in a World Aerobatic Championships, pilots had to be sponsored by Canada's national aero club, the Royal Canadian Flying Clubs Association (RCFCA). A team could only be sanctioned by a recognized Canadian national aerobatic association. Since IAC was a division of the American based EAA, it did not qualify.



So it was that in late 1973 steps were taken to form such an association and on May 1, 1974, Aerobatics Canada came into being. Doug Murray was its first president and it was encouraged and supported by Canadian aviation businessmen like Mike Sifton, owner of Buttonville airport, Herb Cunningham, President of EAA Canada, and Ken Gamble, owner of Barn Full of Parts. The first Aerobatics Canada chapters were: Chapter 2 Quebec, 3 SW Ontario, 4 Toronto, 5 Ottawa, 6 Edmonton, 7 Calgary, and 8 Vancouver making it a nation-wide organization (there was no Chapter

1). A Winnipeg chapter formed later.

Jay Hunt, who had begun flying aerobatics in 1973, became one of its founding directors. By this time, he was flying Unlimited in CF-DIP, the first factory built two seat Pitts S-2A in Canada, which he had purchased from warbird collector Don Plumb, of Windsor, Ontario.



1973 Canadian Aerobatic Championship winners

Deryck Hickox, Bob Arend and Frank Jenkinson and his partners all decided to upgrade their three Pitts S-1Cs to S-1S standard so they could be competitive at the unlimited level. Deryck built three sets of symmetrical, four aileron wings for them and the original engines were replaced with 180 hp Lycomings.

The first Canadian National Aerobatic Championship was held at Centralia, Ontario September 27-30, 1973. This contest would select the first Canadian pilots to attend a World Aerobatic Championships in Poland in 1974. Gerry Younger was the winner and Frank Jenkinson came second in the unlimited category and would have been those pilots. Unfortunately, Aerobatics Canada's objective of sending pilots to the 1974 World Aerobatic Championships was put on hold when Poland could not complete the necessary arrangements and the contest was cancelled. The

next WAC was scheduled to be held in two years at Kiev, USSR so the focus of Aerobatics Canada now turned to 1976.

1974 saw Aerobatics Canada hold contests at Lindsay and Goderich Ontario, and St. Jean Quebec. The season closed with the Canadian National Championships on September 14-15 at Stratford, Ontario. By this time Jay Hunt had upgraded his mount to the Pitts S1S CF-UWQ and moved up to competing in the unlimited category. UWQ was formerly owned by Frank Jenkinson and his partners. He was now constructing his own highly modified biplane, the FJ Special.



Jay Hunt's Pitts S1S

The 1975 Canadian Nationals at which pilots were to be chosen for the 1976 World Aerobatic Championships was held September 20-21 at Picton, Ontario. However, the final determination of pilots was not made until the spring of 1976 when Gerry Younger and Jay Hunt were selected to be the first Canadians to fly in a WAC at Kiev, USSR.

1976 World Aerobatic Championship



Choosing pilots for the world championships was the easy part. Finding the money and transportation to travel to the USSR was the greater challenge. Aerobatics Canada organized efforts in support of the effort. Many members volunteered to man fundraising booths at aviation events and organize a publicity campaign to solicit donations. Gerry Younger arranged for charter airline Wardair to fly him and his airplane to England and back. Transportation for Jay Hunt's airplane took longer. DND were approached to take it to Germany in one of their Hercules aircraft but were unable to do so. They did however provide accommodations and pre-contest practice space at their Canadian air bases in Germany. The United States Aerobatic Team had arranged transport overseas in a USAF C5A Galaxy but were unable to include a

Canadian airplane. Air Canada was approached but said their aircraft could not accommodate a Pitts Special.

Finally in desperation, Aerobatics Canada approached the Soviet embassy to see if they could help. The



Gerry Younger and Jay Hunt's planes ready for transport

Russians initially agreed to take the aircraft in one of their Ilyushin transports, but later determined that a Pitts S1-S would not fit in their cargo bay. Upon hearing a radio report that the Russians had offered to take the Canadian, Claude Taylor, president of Air Canada, called to say they had determined that the Pitts would fit in the hold of their new 747 Combi aircraft if the wings were taken off. They offered to fly it from Toronto International airport to Frankfurt

Germany and back.

Monday, July 12, 1976, was the day of the Air Canada departure for Germany. Gerry Younger had previously departed and was practicing in England with the British team. Reassembling Jay Hunt's Pitts in Frankfurt was followed by several days of practice at CFB Lahr and Baden Solingen. The two Canadians then joined several other teams at Straubing West Germany for the flight into the USSR.

On Jul 22, 1976, a flight consisting of 30 airplanes departed Straubing for the 9:00 flight to Kiev, USSR. The two day, 9 hour trip included stops in Bratislava and Kosice, Czechoslovakia, Lvov and Rovno, Ukraine arriving at the Chaika Aerodrome, Kiev USSR on July 23.



Gerry Younger and Jay Hunt at WAC opening ceremony

To be considered a national team, a country needed at least three competitors, so Canada was not included in team standings. Jay Hunt and Gerry Younger would compete as individual Canadian entrants.

After ten days and three competition flights, Gerry Younger finished in 44th place and Jay Hunt in 51st out of 65 contestants. This set the stage for Canadian participation in future WACs.

Canada did not enter the 1978 World Aerobatic Championships in Czechoslovakia. Instead, their sights were set on sending a full five member team to the 1980 championships at Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

The 1980 World Aerobatic Championships in the USA



The 1980 World Aerobatic Championships had been awarded to the USA and were scheduled to be held at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, August 17-30. Canada decided to take advantage of this and sent a full team of competitors along with a strong ground support contingent. Roger Hadfield, father of future Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield was chosen as team manager. Jay Hunt, who was in the process of designing and building a new aerobatic airplane, did not try for a pilot's position on the World team, electing instead to assume the responsibilities as Chief Delegate.



Frank Jenkinson's FJ Special

Four pilots qualified at the Canadian National Championships at Centralia August 25-6, Gerry Younger, Bill Kennedy, Gord Price, and Frank Jenkinson flying his new turbocharged FJ Special.

In 1979, Jay Hunt was elected President of Aerobatics Canada taking over from Gerry Younger. Because of the effort required to organize Canada's participation in the World Championships, he did not compete during 1980. He kept his judging skills current by critiquing team pilots and judging the Canadian Open at Centralia. He also taught flying scholarship ground school for the Ottawa Air Cadets 51 Squadron flying scholarship program.



Ladislav Bezak 1980

Through a contact Gord Price had made, Canada was able to acquire a top notch trainer for our pilots. Ladislav Bezak was the winner of the first World Aerobatic Championships in 1960. He had been a test pilot for the Zlin Aircraft Company in Czechoslovakia and is best known as creator of the lomcevak tumbling maneuver. Several years later he escaped in his Zlin aircraft with his wife and four small children crammed into the two seat cockpit. Gord, an Air Canada pilot, had met him in Germany and arranged to sponsor him into Canada. Ladi immediately went to work bringing our four pilots up to world standards. At a training camp in New Richmond, Minnesota, about an hour from Oshkosh, Ladi worked to hone their pilots' skills for the competition at Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Disappointingly, the Russians and Czechs had decided not to participate for "technical, financial and political" reasons. Fifty competitors from nine other countries did attend, however, and things looked good for an exciting contest.

The Canadians were a visible presence at the championships. In true Olympic style Canada entered the opening parade in smart uniforms led by the Canadian and team flags carried by an honour guard of Air Cadets. The opening ceremony included a welcoming speech by General Claude LaFrance of the Canadian Air Force. In addition, the Canadian Aerobatic Team logo was spray painted at strategic locations about the field.

The US team placed first overall, swept five of the top six positions in the men's division and the top three in the Women's division. Gord Price was the top scoring Canadian in thirteenth place.

1980s - The Golden Age of Aerobatics Canada

Following the success of the 1980 Canadian Aerobatic team, aerobatic activity took an upswing for the next several years. New chapters of Aerobatics Canada were started by Bill Kennedy in Winnipeg, Grant Mackay and Bob Petryk in Calgary, Dr. Henry Wyatt in Edmonton and Jay Hunt in Ottawa. The four western chapters began holding regular contests there and for several years, the annual Canadian National Aerobatic Championships began alternating every second year between eastern and western Canada. The Canadian National Championships were held at Gimli, Brandon, and Steinbach, Manitoba, later Rocky Mountain House, Alberta.

In 1982, Frank Jenkinson, Gord Price and Bob Levine represented Canada at the 11th World Aerobatic Championships in Spitzerberg, Austria.

In 1986, Gerry Younger and Guido Lepore flew in the 13th World Aerobatic Championships in South Cerney, England.

Two new all Canadian airplane designs

Jay Hunt's experience at the World Aerobatic Championships in Kiev convinced him that the days of Pitts



Jay Hunt's CH-180 Super Acro Zenith

Special dominance in unlimited competition were coming to an end. He believed that the future of aerobatic airplane design was in monoplanes. He studied the latest European designs including the Russian Yak 50, Czechoslovakian Zlin 50 and French CAP 20L, one looking for features that might give an advantage. Using what he had learned, he partnered with homebuilt aircraft designer Chris Heintz of Zenair Aircraft to build an all-aluminum, low wing, single seat monoplane with unlimited aerobatic capabilities, the CH-180 Super Acro Zenith. The first flight of C-GZEN "the J Bird" took place on July 24, 1981. In Partnership with Zenair, Jay founded a company which marketed kits for the CH-180. In the end five examples were built by homebuilders in Canada, The USA and France.

In Guelph, Ontario, Gord Price took a different approach. Believing biplanes to still be the best aerobatic



Gord Price's Ultimate 300

machines, he evolved a new line of airplane designs from the venerable Pitts Special. He also incorporated many of the latest advances in aviation design to create a series he called the Ultimate Aircraft. They ranged from a low cost basic model to the unlimited capable Ultimate 300. Gord's company sold airplane kits around the world.

Unfortunately, events conspired to bring an end to both ventures. The 1980s was a period of inflation and high interest rates making leisure activities such as aerobatics less affordable. At the same time, a series of homebuilt accidents led to huge increases in insurance costs for airplanes, especially aerobatic ones. As a result, both of

these ventures eventually closed down

Aerobatic Instructors Rating

Since the end of World War II, Canadian officialdom, wary of a re-emergence of the barnstorming days of the 1920s and '30s, had actively discouraged any notions that flying could be fun. A tragic accident at the 1949 Cleveland Air Races where Bill Odam's green Mustang crashed killing a young mother and her baby only confirmed their worst fears. Civilians were forbidden from flying high performance surplus military aircraft.

Private pilot training curricula were designed with the sole aim of turning out pilots for commercial aviation. Advanced forms of flying such as aerobatics were eliminated. Postwar training aircraft designs were limited to utility category maneuvers until 1964 when the Bellanca Citabria became the first new design to be approved for aerobatics. Full spin training was replaced with incipient spin recognition and recovery under the reasoning that if pilots did not venture close to the edges of the flight envelope, they could not get into trouble. There was no form of accreditation for instructors to teach aerobatics in Canada.

This left the emerging aerobatic community in a Catch 22 situation. It was illegal to teach flying without an ab initio instructor's certificate. Most flying schools had no interest in teaching aerobatics and most instructors had no current aerobatic experience. Few competent aerobatic pilots held instructor's certificates or had the desire to obtain them as we only wanted to teach aerobatics to licensed pilots. The loophole that many had used for years was to obtain a commercial pilot's licence which allowed us to fly for a fee. They would then teach aerobatics to licensed pilots through flying clubs like EAA Chapter 189.

Aerobatics Canada sought to change this and Jay Hunt began discussing the need for accreditation of aerobatic instructors with various Department of Transport officials. He worked with DOT Inspector Wayne Foy to develop primary and advanced aerobatic instruction curricula. These ultimately led to four new classes of aerobatic instructor's certification. Jay Hunt became the first Class 1 Aerobatic Certificate giving him the right to teach advanced aerobatics and to test and certify other aerobatic instructors.

It was at about the same time that Aerobatics Canada Chapter 5 applied for a permanent aerobatic practice area adjacent to Gatineau Airport. It was granted and became a centre of aerobatic activity in the National Capital which it continues to be to this day.

The 1988 World Aerobatic Championships come to Canada



The 1988 14th World Aerobatic Championships would be held in Canada for the first time ever at Red Deer Alberta. Eight countries participated and, for the first time, Canada entered a full team of five pilots. Gord Price flew his new Ultimate 300 aircraft while Gerry Younger, Guido Lepore, Bob Levigne and Randy Gagne flew Pitts Specials. Jay Hunt served as the Canadian judge. He says “It was truly amazing to see how aerobatics at the world level had advanced in the twelve years since Kiev. New high powered airplanes such as the Russian Sukhoi, German Extra 300 and French CAP 231 were capable of things we had never dreamed possible.”

Red Deer raised the bar of aerobatic performance that has continued to evolve over the twenty years since. The cost of being competitive in aerobatics also went through the roof. Where previously a Pitts S-1S or Super Acro Zenith could be built from a kit for around \$50,000 these new airplanes could cost \$200,000 or more today a truly competitive mount such as the Edge 540 or MXS can cost well over \$300,000. This also attracts big money in the form of sponsorships.



From Pilot's Magazine October 1988

The 1990s and Beyond

Following the frenetic activity of putting on a World Aerobic Championships in 1988, the aerobic community has experienced up and down cycles. Aerobic activity at the local, regional contests continued unabated. A younger generation of pilots, often children of previous competitors, continues to keep the sport active and growing.

However, growing the sport has had its challenges. Competitive aircraft can easily cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Aircraft and qualified instructors are hard to find, making it difficult for pilots with the interest and ability to embrace the sport.

During the 1980s, eight Aerobatics Canada chapters were active across the country. By the 1990s, activity had concentrated around two main regions, Alberta and south-western Ontario.

The Calgary and Edmonton chapters which had merged into the Alberta Aerobatics Club have experienced enough slow, steady growth to be self-sustaining. As a result, Alberta has become the most active centre of aerobatics in Canada. They have held one or two contests per year nearly every year since WAC88, drawing 10 to 15 competitors from B.C. Alberta, Manitoba and Pacific Northwestern IAC chapters.

Aerobatics in the Toronto area slowly migrated towards south-west Ontario in the 1990s. It continues to thrive there, hosting an annual contest at Huronia airport situated on the shore of Lake Huron, and co-sponsoring the Can-Am aerobic contest with IAC Chapter 88 in Michigan. Several of their members have entered the Advanced World Aerobic Championships in recent years.

Other chapters have not fared so well.

The British Columbia chapter is still active with about 20 members. They haven't held a contest in BC for some time but BC pilots have participated in WAC's and WAAC's in recent years. Their members participate and assist in IAC contests in Ephrata, WA and Pendleton, OR.

The Ottawa chapter attracted members from airports in Smith Falls, Carleton Place and Arnprior. Gatineau airport across the river in Quebec, was adjacent to an approved aerobic training area and became a central location for practice and competitions, supported by Vintage Wings of Canada owner, Mike Potter. In the 2000s, Peter Ashwood Smith, David Arthurs, and Jonathan Rotundo, who taught aerobatics in a Super Decathlon, attempted to revive the chapter at Rockcliffe but by 2024 it had become inactive.

In Montreal, John Wyman led a group of aerobic enthusiasts who kept the chapter active through the 1990s into the 2010s. They hosted an annual contest and held judges' schools until 2006. Since then, the group became too small to organize contests so they held a few practice sessions at the Lachute and Sorel Quebec airports and attended competitions in Ontario and the North-Eastern US. By 2024, the club had become inactive.



The Winnipeg chapter has become inactive, its members joining with the Alberta club. In 2024, they will host the Canadian National Championships at Steinbach airport south of Winnipeg.

As noted elsewhere, the introduction of an advanced category to World Aerobic Championships has enabled more Canadians to enter than ever before. In 2023, Canada sent 8 pilots to the WAAC at Las Vegas, Nevada:

Miles Crane, Alberta;	Dave Barbet, Alberta;
Luke Penner, Manitoba;	Ryan Chapman, Ontario;
Jerzy Strzyz, Alberta;	Christian Baxter, British Columbia;
Mark Cunningham, B. C.;	Neil Harris, Alberta.

Jesse Mack of Alberta also entered as an "Hors Concours" independent competitor.

Canadians at other World Aerobatic Championships

Canada did not enter several World Aerobatic Championships due to the cost and distance involved in attending. However, Canada continued to be represented at several World Championships. For the most part, pilots attended at their own expense.

Vancouverites Guido Lepore and Lloyd Beaulé became unlimited competitors and would variously go on to represent Canada at future WACs.

In 1986, Gerry Younger and Guido Lepore entered the WAC in South Cerney, England

In 1990 Guido Lepore and Lloyd Beaulé represented Canada at the 15th World Aerobatic Championships in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland.

In 1996, Gerry Younger entered his fourth world competition at the 18th World Aerobatic Championships in Oklahoma City, USA, accompanied by Lloyd Beaulé, Pat Cruchley and Randy Gagne.



Dave Barbet

Doug Jardine was the sole Canadian entrant in the 2003 22nd World Aerobatic Championships in Lakeland Florida and the 2009 25th World Aerobatic Championships in Silverstone England.

As of 2024, Canada's latest appearance was at the 27th World Aerobatic Championships in 2013 at Denison Texas. Three competitors from Western Canada participated. Dave Barbet became the last pilot to fly a Pitts Special at an unlimited WAC. Jerzy Strzyz flew a Sukhoi S26MX and Ann Marie Ward flew a Zivco Edge 540. Jay Hunt was an assistant Judge to Violeta Gedminaitė from Lithuania.



Jerzy Strzyz

Reaching the unlimited class of aerobatics has become increasingly more challenging in recent years. The advent of higher powered monoplanes such as the Extra 330 and MXS has resulted in an increasing level of difficulty in programs. The effort and cost of reaching this level of competition has become unreachable for most pilots. As a result, many former unlimited pilots have dropped back to the advanced category and have argued for the inclusion of an advanced category in international competition.

In response to this demand, in 1995, the FAI introduced an advanced category, the World Advanced Aerobatic Championships, patterned after the International Aerobatic Club's advanced category in the USA, Canada entered the advanced WAAC for the first time in 1997 when Doug Jardine flew at Lawrence Kansas.

In 2004 Jason Newburg from Ontario traveled to Ljungbyhed, Sweden to compete in the WAAC.

In 2008, four contestants represented Canada at the 8th WAAC in Pendleton Oregon, Guido Lepore, Jerzy Strzyz, Dave Barbet and Royden Hayes.

In 2008 the FAI introduced the first world aerobatic competition specific to the Yak 52 aircraft design. In 2014 Rick Fiecht of Calgary, who flies his own Yak 52, became the first Canadian to enter the 4th World Aerobatic Y52 Championship in Mossel Bay, South Africa by renting one there. He also entered the 5th World Yak-52 Aerobatic Championships in Klokovo, Russia in 2017.

In 2014, the FAI also added an intermediate category to the World Aerobatic Championships. To date no Canadian has entered this category.

Below is a complete list of Canadian competitors at Unlimited and Advanced WACs

Unlimited

Date	Location	Pilots
1976	Kiev, USSR	Gerry Younger; Jay Hunt
1980	Oshkosh, USA	Gord Price; Gerry Younger; Frank Jenkinson; Bill Kennedy
1982	Spitzerberg Austria	Gord Price; Robert Lavigne; Frank Jenkinson
1986	South Cerney, England	Gerry Younger; Guido Lepore
1988	Red Deer, Canada	Gord Price; Guido Lepore; Randy Gagne; Lloyd Beaulé
1990	Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland	Guido Lepore; Randy Gagne
1996	Oklahoma City, USA	Lloyd Beaulé; Gerry Younger; Pat Cruchley ; Randy Gagne
2003	Lakeland, Fla, USA	Doug Jardine
2009	Silverstone England	Doug Jardine
2013	Denison, Texas	Dave Barbet; Jerzy Strzyz; Ann Marie Ward

Advanced

1997	Lawrence, Kansas	Doug Jardine
2004	Ljungbyhed, Sweden	Jason Newburg
2008	Pendleton, Oregon	Guido Lepore; Jerzy Strzyz; Dave Barbet; Royden Heays
2023	Las Vegas Nevada	Luke Penner, Neil Harris, Jerzy Strzyz, Christian Baxter, Dave Barbet, Mark Cunningham, Ryan Chapman, Miles Crane



Frank Jenkinson shortly before he died

Tragically, just two weeks after he won the Canadian National Aerobatic Championships at Gatineau Quebec, Frank Jenkinson was killed on September 25, 1983. He was being filmed north of Toronto for a television commercial when something went wrong in the borrowed Pitts S-1S he was flying and it spun into the ground, killing him instantly. The exact cause of the crash was never determined.

There has been no Canadian entrant in a WAC since 2013.

One Intermediate WAC was held in Mossel Bay, South Africa in 2014 but no Canadian participated.

Rick Fiecht, of Calgary, entered the 4th World Yac-52 Aerobatic Championships in Mossel Bay, South Africa, and also the 5th in Klokovo, Russia in 2017.

Prize money has seldom been offered at aerobatic contests and when it was, the amount was small in comparison to the cost of getting there. Awards consisted only of trophies or plaques.



• *Gord Price in his YAK 50*

Following WAC 88, Gord Price took a sabbatical from aerobatics for several years. He then acquired a Russian built YAK 50 unlimited aerobatic airplane. He used it as advertising for his gastropub in Meaford, Ontario. He flew air shows in it, including the prestigious CNE Air Show in Toronto, from 2017 until he retired in 2022.

For several years, the Red Bull Air Races combined low level air racing and aerobatics into a professional sport that attracts tens of thousands of spectators and offers huge sums in prize money. Attracted by this, some of the world's top aerobatic competitors have moved on to Red Bull.



Pete McLeod

In 2008, two Canadian Pilots, Peter McLeod & Doug Jardine, entered the European Unlimited Championships at Hradec Králové, Czech Republic as “Hors Concours” competitors. This was an “audition” for the Red Bull Air Races.

Pete McLeod, from London, Ontario, became Canada's sole entrant in the Red Bull Air Races in 2009 and competed in every race until Red Bull decided to end the competition at the end of 2019.

Since then, Pete McLeod has continued to amaze and inspire aviation enthusiasts with his air show performances.

Future of Canadian Aerobatics

The rising cost of learning to fly, buying or renting an aircraft, liability insurance, and even aviation fuel has put obtaining a pilot's license out of reach of most people. The lack of affordable aerobatic aircraft and qualified instructors continues to be an impediment to the growing of the sport. Even a primary aerobatic trainer can cost one hundred thousand dollars or more. An unlimited class aerobatic machine can easily reach one quarter million dollars or more. As a result, aerobatic activity in Canada has declined from its peak in the 1980s to a smaller group of dedicated enthusiasts.

The Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia chapters of Aerobatics Canada continue to be active, running a number of local events annually, and participating in IAC contests in the USA. Their ambition is to have Canada host an WAAC in the future.

Aerobatic Instruction is hard to find in Canada. There are several flying schools that offer aerobatic instruction at various levels. The best source of information on where to find aerobatic training is the Aerobatics Canada web site at <https://aerobaticscanada.org/training/>

Aerobatics Canada continues to promote recreational aerobatics as a means to improve pilot skills. The availability of suitable training aircraft and qualified aerobatic instructors continues to be a problem in Canada. New aerobatics capable trainers such as the Grob G 115 are becoming available and may help improve the situation. Aerobatics Canada believes that basic aerobatics should be an essential part of every pilot's training. Just knowing how to recover from an inverted attitude or stop an uncontrollable spin can save many lives. Their hope for the future is that by bringing greater public visibility to the sport of competition aerobatics, they can help move this idea forward in the future.

Keep on Flying!



Luc Martineau's Pitts S-2C – Lachute Aviation Quebec