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THE ACE MAKER

Greg Colyer Hits the Circuit in his T-33



By John Parker

Every year, there are several new additions to the airshow circuit. These newcomers often bring fresh ideas, new routines, or aircraft which haven't often found their way into the public eye in recent years. Having the perfect combination of heritage, grace, performance, and beauty is what every airshow act should include. This basic fundamental sometimes separates those whose first years as performers aren't as lucrative as others.

Last year I had the distinct privilege of meeting Gregory "Wired" Colyer and his beautiful T-33 named *Ace Maker* at the Golden West Fly-In at Marysville, California. I had never been up close to a T-33

before, but Greg was happy to show me around his airplane and explain the nuances of flying it, just like I am sure he had done a thousand times already during that very day. But there was something different about Greg – I didn't feel like I was getting the same spiel he had given to those thousand prior visitors. Through his enthusiasm and love for the airplane, I felt like my tour was the only one that mattered to him at the moment.

I remember the very first airshow I ever attended as a very young kid. There was this bright and shiny Pitts Special, and my eyes gleaned with anticipation just to talk to the pilot. Sadly that pilot chose to run both me and my friend away. I bring this up because after my tour with Greg, a young kid who was about the same age I was for my first



Greg Colyer in his T-33, the "Ace Maker" (photo by John Parker).



Greg Colyer (photo by John Parker).

airshow approached Greg. With a big smile and his obvious passion for aviation, Greg started in on a new tour, and I will bet a future aviator might just emerge from that experience.

Greg Colyer

Greg Colyer brings a renewed level of enthusiasm and passion to the airshow scene. A consummate gentleman, Greg is eager to listen to the stories of those who have flown the aircraft he is demonstrating, or pass on to the younger generation the stories he has learned. His selfless character is welcoming and inviting to all who meet him.

A California native, Greg took his first flight at the age of seven at the Schellville airport in Sonoma County, and was a licensed pilot by the age of 18. Greg served in the U.S. Army from 1982-1987, and upon completion of his term, he began his service with the FAA as an Air Traffic Controller at the Oakland Air Route Traffic Control Center. For 23 years Greg has been keeping the skies safe, and he applies this same level of precision to his airshow routine. Greg currently holds a



Greg also races bicycles for the Taleo cycling team (photo courtesy of Greg Colyer)

commercial pilot certificate with instrument single and multi-engine ratings. He is also a Certified Flight Instructor and is type-rated in the Aero Vodochody L-39, L-29, and Lockheed T-33. Greg also currently holds a level II aerobatic low level card and a FAST lead formation card.

Greg's life certainly doesn't just revolve around airplanes and work. He's actually a bit of a physical fitness machine. He competes competitively in Ironman Triathlon events and races bicycles for the Taleo cycling team. His bikes are custom painted by Trek as a fighter plane, no less. I have always wondered where he gets his incredible energy. Certainly, his rigorous workout schedule is a contributing factor.

Greg's prior airshow experience started in the T-34 where he would display it or simply perform fly-bys. It wasn't until he imported an L-29 from Romania in 2003 that he taught himself aerobatics and began to develop his very own airshow routine.

The T-33 Shooting Star

Greg's longing for a higher performance jet and a "real" piece of American history led him to the T-33 Shooting Star in 2008. The T-33's lines are sleek, the silhouette is sexy, and the sound is nothing short of beautiful. It always amazes me that within about six short years, airplanes went from blunt radial engine designs like the Republic P-47, to the incredibly smooth and aerodynamically clean-looking Shooting Star.

The T-33 Shooting Star was an aircraft that ushered in new concepts in design and a new generation of both pilots and



Greg rolls the "Ace Maker" (photo by Clark Cook).

engineers. Designed by famed aeronautical engineer Kelly Johnson, the Shooting Star ushered in a new generation of aviators flying faster, higher, and with greater capabilities than ever before.

In June of 1943, Lockheed was asked to submit a proposal to develop an aircraft which could compete with the new German Me-262 jet and which could be mated with a prototype British jet engine, the Goblin. Only 143 days later, the prototype was delivered to Muroc Army Airfield. That first prototype of the P-80 flew for the first time on January 8, 1944.

World War II ended before the P-80 would see combat service; however, it would prove to be an invaluable asset during the Korean War, re-designated as the F-80. On November 8, 1950 an F-80 piloted by Lt. Russell J. Brown made the first jet vs. jet combat victory while engaged with an enemy Mig-15.

In 1948, Lockheed modified the P-80 design into the first American jet trainer, designated the T-33A. The original T-33 was an F-80B fuselage with a 26 inch section added forward of the wing root and another 12 inch section added forward of the rear fuselage for balance and stability. The T-33 also featured wing-tip fuel tanks and dual flight controls. Almost 6,000 T-33s were eventually built, including 649 for the Navy and 1,058 for foreign air forces.



Greg in his office (photo by John Parker).

The Ace Maker Routine

Greg hit the airshow circuit as a solo act in *Ace Maker* for the 2009 season, performing in eight shows including Seattle Sea Fair and Fleet Week in San Francisco. "It was quite a year for a new guy," Greg says. "The T-33 makes it easy to look good."

But during his first airshow performing in the T-33, he learned a great lesson. "I completely messed up my planned routine and wasn't happy about anything," he admits. "I felt like I didn't deserve to be there." Shortly after Greg landed, he had a talk with his ACE, Wayne Handley, who also happened to be the announcer of the show. Wayne told Greg, "You can always leave stuff out. Just never add anything in. Be safe and smart. The crowd will never know what you were supposed to do!"

Greg attended ICAS in 2009 for the first time and booked 12 shows during the convention for the 2010 season. As a result, Greg's show is no longer just a local West Coast attraction. He has performed in Washington, Arizona, Southern California, Nevada, Utah, Illinois, and Missouri during 2010. Greg and the *Ace Maker*

have now been seen by millions, with not a single cancellation.

Greg's airshow routine in the *Ace Maker* is anything but "routine" and he has honed his current airshow sequence into what is often described as "graceful, smooth, and elegant." Though the T-33 doesn't



Greg in formation with the Airshow Buzz T-33 (self portrait by Greg Colyer).

have an afterburner, its unmistakable engine start, and early-jet rumble during fly-bys can't be mistaken for the vacuum cleaner sounds of the L-39s or the ear-deafening sounds of the modern fighters that are commonly seen at airshows.

From his opening photo pass, to his vertical roll into a split-S, to his Cuban eight, to his minimum-radius figure eight, inverted pass, and four-point roll, one must keep in mind that this airplane is controlled by cables and pulleys, and not by computers and hydraulics. One of the things that accentuate Greg's performance is the clean appearance of the T-33 design. On his knife-edge pass, one can certainly appreciate how beautiful this airplane truly is.

As a spectator at airshows, I often find myself watching the crowd for their reactions to various acts. All ages from young to old can appreciate the *Ace Maker*. Tears may well from the eyes of those from older generations who may have once flown a T-33. At the same time, smiles fill the faces of kids who just had the chance to meet Greg. The T-33 may not be the latest and greatest fighter, but Greg and the *Ace Maker* offer an emotional connection where grandpa or grandma and grandson or granddaughter can share in an aviation experience.

Greg has also founded the T-33 Heritage Foundation to help in

The "Ace Maker" at the 2010 Scott AFB airshow in September (photo by Craig Scaling).



the preservation of the Shooting Star and other Korean War vintage aircraft. Greg's hope is that he can help ensure future generations can enjoy and learn about America's aviation heritage.

Greg would like everyone to know that what he's accomplished would not have been possible without the help and support of his friends and family. He was told more than once that flying vintage fighter jets was a rich man's game, and he wasn't rich. But Greg says he is rich with his good friends and supportive family. "My friends volunteer to help me with everything that has to do with being a successful airshow act," he says. "I wouldn't be where I am without them."

Greg would like to send a special thanks to Wayne Handley, Randy Howell, Colin Clark, Bernie Vasquez, John Parker, and Ken O'Donnell for all their help and friendship. He also wants to thank Steve Hinton for sharing his expertise on the Shooting Star, and all the other veterans and legends of the airshow circuit that have made him feel welcome and part of this very special community.

As 2011 rolls around, check out his schedule online or add him to your own airshow. You can find Greg on the web at www.Ace-MakerAirshows.com.

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