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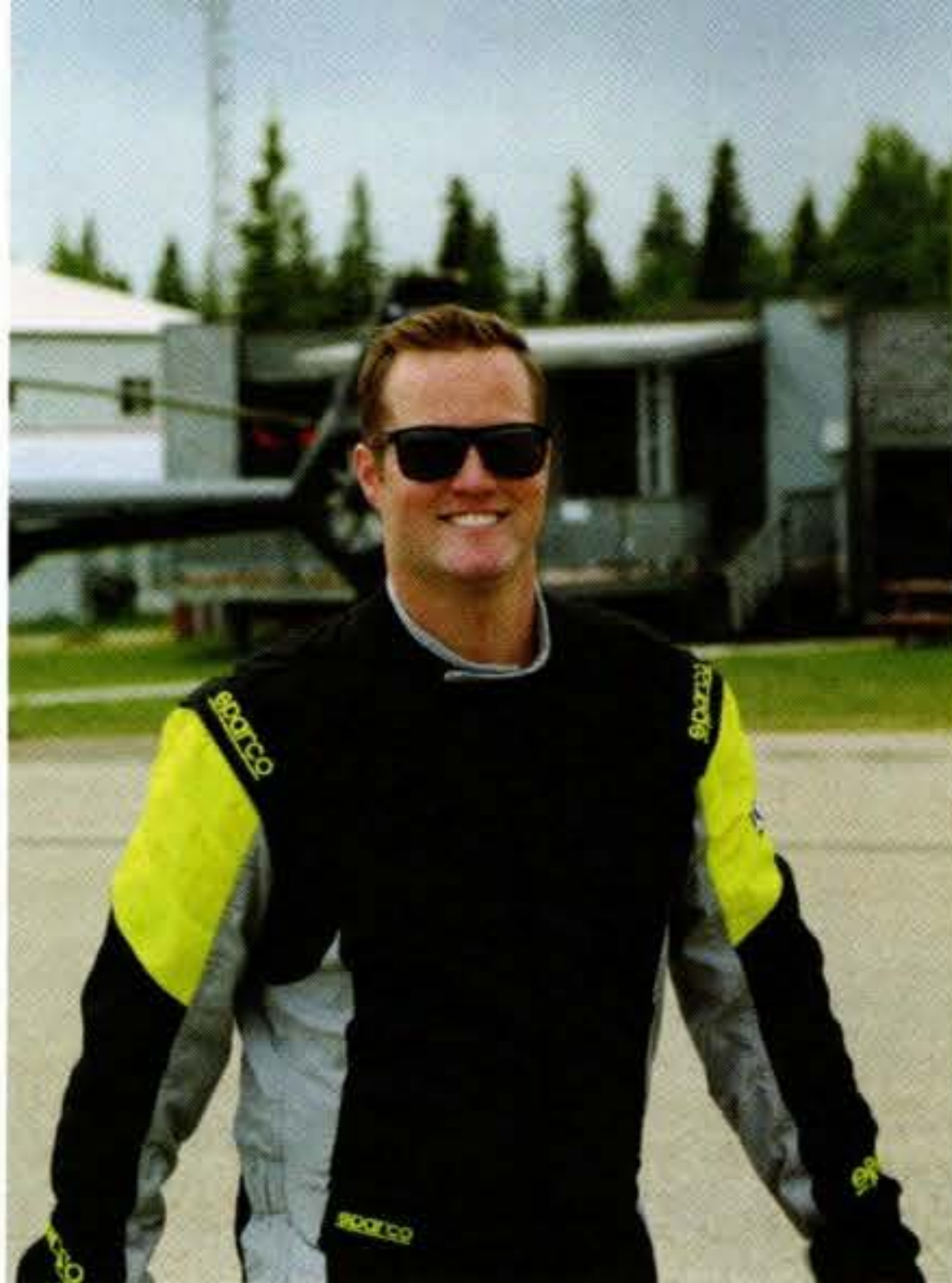
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SHOW PILOT





AIR SHOW STANDOUT

KYLE FOWLER KEEPS IT DIFFERENT

BY RUSS NILES

As air show pilots go, Kyle Fowler is the first to admit he's not in the same league as the superstars who entertain thousands at the world's biggest shows but there he was, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Sean Tucker, Rob Holland and Kyle Franklin on aviation's biggest stage.

In fact, the Rocky Mountain House auto mechanic, who has only been performing for three years, probably wouldn't have even qualified to perform at AirVenture 2018 except for his choice of airplane and his refreshing, winning attitude.

Fowler captured the imaginations and attention of tens of thousands with a relatively slow and almost eerily quiet performance of gentle aerobatics and photo passes in a futuristically angular, canard-wing Long EZ homebuilt.

"I'm the only one who flies anything like it in North America," said Fowler, who is as surprised as anyone at his meteoric rise to the very top of the air show world. He said his relatively tame performance is just an out-of-the-ordinary demonstration of an extraordinary aircraft design.

"You've got to stand out by being different," he said.

Fowler, whose father Ken was half of Team Rocket, a two-ship team flying homebuilts, grew up in the air show business, often missing school to help his dad on the circuit.

"When I was 12, I announced my first airshow for my dad in Arizona," said Fowler, a 32-year-old avowed family man who works for an oilfield company all over the oil patches of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Like many, he was enthralled by the revolutionary designs from the fertile mind of Scaled Composites' Burt Rutan, but the Long Ez, Rutan's answer to the Cessna 172 was his favourite.

"I remember when I was a kid saying to myself that I would buy one and do airshows in it," said Fowler.



A few years ago, Fowler made that dream come true when he found a beautifully built and well-loved Long Ez in Medicine Hat.

The original builder Boyne Lewis, who had kept the painstakingly-built aircraft in his hangar during the 29 years he enjoyed flying it, had lost his medical and reluctantly put the aircraft up for sale. But Fowler said he wanted the airplane to go to a good home.

"I told him exactly what I wanted to do with the airplane and he was pretty excited about it," said Fowler.

Something that attracted Fowler to the plane was its colour. Almost

all Long EZes are painted white to keep the composite airframe cool and prevent delamination. Lewis's bright, pale yellow paint scheme was a striking contrast to most of the fleet and it had never suffered any heat damage. It's also a great colour for visibility by air show patrons and Fowler has kept the original paint.

The addition of decals and promotional lettering has increased the risk of heat damage, but Fowler pays a lot of attention to preventing it. "You have to keep a close eye on it."

The Long Ez was designed by Rutan as a super-efficient commuter aircraft

▲ Kyle Fowler has cut a swath through the air show world with his unique Long Ez show. He appeared at some of North America's biggest shows, including AirVenture and the Canadian International Air Show.

and Lewis had acknowledged that intent with his choice of a tiny Lycoming O-235 engine whose 115 horsepower could push the aircraft along at 125 knots for more than 2,000 miles.

Fowler's main sponsor Aerosport Power replaced the fuel-sipping original engine with a more robust IO-320, which has substantially boosted per-



formance. Another engine change is likely in the works with the lighter, yet more powerful IO-340 Stroker engine leading the list of candidates so far. Long EZes have a delicate centre of gravity (it's why pilots park them with the nose wheel retracted) and engine weight is a critical factor in maintaining that balance.

Another major sponsor, Catto Propellers, will finish off the new power package. Keeping it all running smoothly is crew chief Gavin Lee. Other sponsors include Lightspeed Headsets and Softie Parachutes.

All the power in the world can't

change the inherent limitations of the airframe and its aerodynamic characteristics. The aircraft can take a maximum of plus-five and minus-2 Gs and has a narrow speed range for entering most manoeuvres. "It's very unforgiving in the aerobatics that I do," he said.

It all adds up to a relatively sedate show package that involves a lot of slow rolls and knife-edge work. Fowler said he's not trying to compete with the Hollands and Tuckers of the air show world and he's concentrating on offering a splash of colour and variety to the general mix of acts.

"I don't have to be the best pilot out there," he said. "I'm just trying to be different."

And while there is some method to his career plan, he's amazed at the success that 2018 brought. "I cannot believe how much traction I got," he said.

Going into 2019, he said his schedule is filling up quickly and he's hopeful he'll be invited back to Oshkosh and Toronto along with all the other shows he's booked for next season.

There's another issue of balance that Fowler has to pay special attention to. As the father of two and member of a blended family with his girlfriend Miranda and her two children, Fowler must balance a life on the road with his life at home.

*I LOVE IT WHEN
THE KIDS COME UP.
THEY JUST LOVE
THE PLANE*

"I love my family and they are number one above all else but support my adventures with air shows," said Fowler.

Despite his popularity on the air show circuit, it's not lucrative enough to pursue full time and he needs his day job to keep stoking those home fires. However, his employer has embraced the opportunities offered by his weekend work and, in addition to Fowler's main role as a mechanic, he's also the pilot of the corporate Navajo.

"Most days I'm wrenching on vehicles and every once in a while I jump in the Navajo and take them wherever they need to go," he said. Company executives in turn give him broad latitude to pursue the air show career.

Through it all Fowler has been mindful of a key reason that air shows exist, which is to inspire the next generation of pilots and aviation industry workers.

"I love it when the kids come up," he said. "They just love the plane. 🙌"