

**PATTY  
WAGSTAFF**


ABOVE Patty was displaying the Beechcraft T-6B Texan II at this year's Farnborough Airshow. (KEY - DUNCAN CUBITT)

she was the top US medal winner in international competitions three times. She was the first woman to win the title of US National Aerobatic champion, and one of the few people to win it three times. She was also awarded the Betty Skelton First Lady of Aerobatics award an unprecedented six times.

In recognition of her extraordinary performance, her Extra 260 was put on display next to Amelia Earhart's Lockheed Vega at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum. But her aviation career has taken in so much more than aerobatics. Patty has also worked as a bush pilot in Alaska, and as an instructor to the pilots of the Kenya Wildlife Service. And there's more... she's flown as a stunt pilot and aerial co-ordinator for film and television, plus worked as a demonstration pilot for aircraft manufacturers.

With such a varied flying experience, I wondered which aircraft she would class as her favourite. "Can I choose two?" she laughed. "I guess it would have to be my Extra 300 and my Cirrus SR22. You know I love flying different types, but I get back in the Extra and there's nothing like it, it's just overall fun, agile and, well, just everything! And I've flown a lot of different airplanes. I also love my Cirrus. They're poles apart, but both are perfect for doing what they've been designed to do." "And what about your least favourite?"

"I'd say that would be the TBM Avenger. I have a type rating on it and, well, you know, it's just kind of a pig!"

"So do you know how many different types you've flown?" I asked. "I'm not sure," she replied, "I'm going to count them up one day, but probably about 150."

"And what about your best flying moment, is there anything that really

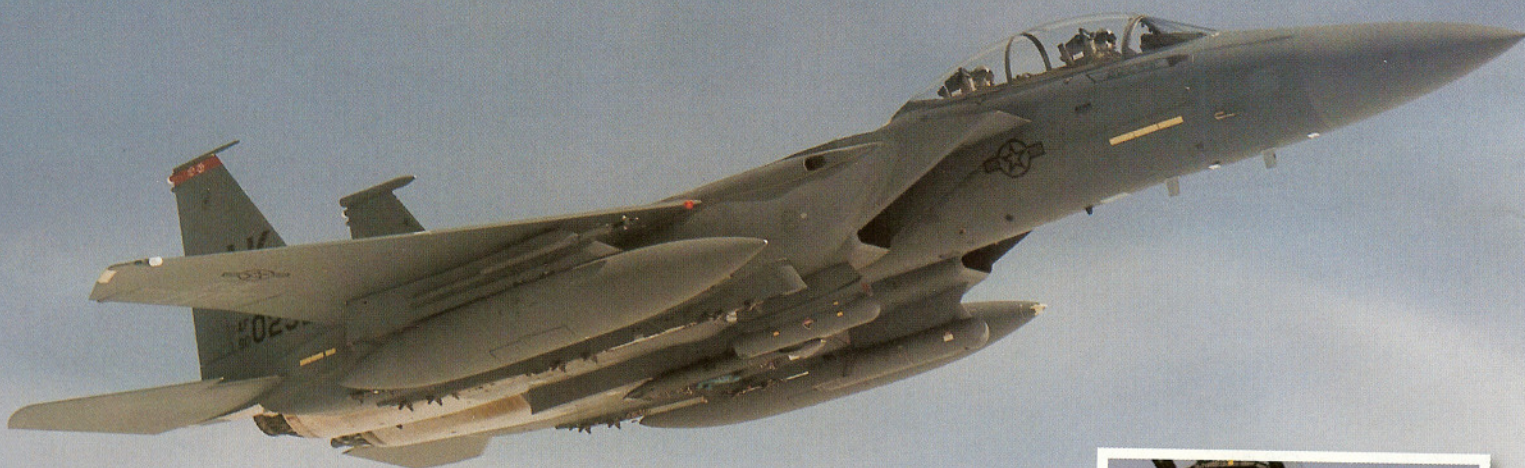
sticks in the memory?" "There really are so many," she replied. "but it's mostly the times that I'm up there alone and I'm on my way home, somewhere in the mid-west and I'm

not on a flight plan. I just love the feeling of freedom that I have. I've also had some amazing experiences in places like Iceland and Kenya. I remember taking off early in the



RIGHT ...and her Cirrus SR22.



PILOT  
PORTRAIT

morning in Kenya, flying over the bush and looking down and seeing a hippo taking a bath in the morning." Though not wishing to spoil the memory, I gently asked about the other side of the coin. "Are there any particularly bad moments that stick out?"

**ABOVE & RIGHT**  
She has flown in  
a number of jet  
fighters, including  
the F-15.

**BELOW** Her current  
Extra is a 300.

"A few. You know - flying over a wreck... of friends." I nodded glumly. "Yes" I agreed, "that's pretty grim. I've experienced that."

"When an accident has happened at an airshow I will always offer to fly. I think it's important that people are left with a good feeling of seeing somebody fly and seeing another pilot in the air."

"Other bad moments probably come when getting scared in foul weather, flying down low and feeling that you don't have any options. But, of course," she continued, "that's the key, always leave yourself an 'out'." And had she had any really close shaves?" I enquired. "Sure" she replied, "I've had things happen. I mean, I've had longerons break

and stuff. But you don't think about it at the time, you just deal with it and then later on when you think back, it takes on a whole different feeling."

As you may well have guessed by now, I really took to Patty. She is smart, sexy, sophisticated and very attractive. This can have its advantages; particularly as the airshow scene is dominated by men (I think she was the only female pilot displaying at Farnborough 2006). As we all know, sex sells, and I suspect that Patty has never been short of a sponsor for her aircraft. But, there's a down side as well. Patty has experienced the nightmare of being stalked, and actually had to move house. Then there's the continual annoyance of having people comment on her hair or just her looks, instead



of on her display! Somehow, I suspect this is something that Brian Lecomber or Nigel Lamb don't have to suffer!

As we were talking about airshows, and Farnborough in particular, I asked if she liked the aircraft she was flying in the show, the Beechcraft T-6B

Texan II. "Oh, I love it," she smiled. It's a real nice airplane to fly.

It's the perfect airplane for the job of military trainer, plus it has so much more capability with the new light attack AT-6 version." When I asked if it would make a good toy, she nodded enthusiastically, but somehow I doubt that there'll be any surplus airframes on the market for a few years!

With such a high profile, Patty is kept busy promoting general aviation, and has lent her name to the 'Be A Pilot' programme (a US industry-led effort to recruit new pilots by offering low-cost introductory flying lessons). As alluded to earlier, she also works as a demonstration pilot and is currently undertaking that role for Raytheon by displaying the Texan II. And, of course, she owns and runs Patty Wagstaff Airshows, and flies her Extra 300 at between 15 to 20 shows a year.

## I REALLY LIKE MODERN PLANES





## PATTY WAGSTAFF

Patty also works on a voluntary basis with the Kenya Wildlife Service as a flight instructor. The KWS operate a small fleet of light aircraft on anti-poacher patrols and Patty donates her time to help train new pilots in the special techniques of taildragging and bush flying. She clearly feels very strongly about conservation and said "the KWS do good work - and need all the help they can get."

We also talked about life on the road, and it was obvious that Patty loves

**RIGHT** Her least favourite is the TBM Avenger, which she feels is "just kind of a pig!" (KEY COLLECTION)



### PATTY'S AWARDS

- 2005 Recipient, Air Force Association Lifetime Achievement Award
- 2005 Inductee, International Aerobatic Club Hall of Fame
- 2005 Katherine Wright Award
- 2002 Katherine and Marjorie Stinson Award
- 1998 Bill Barber Award for Showmanship
- 1997 Recipient, NAA Paul Tissandier Diploma
- 1997 Inductee, Women in Aviation International Hall of Fame
- 1997 Inductee, Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame
- 1996 Recipient, Charlie Hillard Trophy
- 1996 GAN & Flyers Readers Choice Award, Favorite Female Performer
- 1996 Top Scoring US Pilot at World Aerobatic Championships
- 1985-1996 Member, US Aerobatic Team
- 1995 Recipient, ICAS Sword of Excellence Award
- 1988-1994 Winner Betty Skelton 'First Lady of Aerobatics' Trophy
- 1994 National Air and Space Museum Award for Current Achievement
- 1994 NAA Certificate of Honor
- 1993 International Aerobatic Club Champion
- US National Aerobatic Champion 1991, 1992, 1993 US National Aerobatic Championships
- 1990/1992/1994 Top US Medal Winner, World Aerobatic Championships
- 1991 Voted 'Western Flyer Reader's Choice Favorite Airshow Performer'
- 1987 Rolly Cole Memorial Award for Contributions to Sport Aerobatics

getting back to her Spanish-revival style home in Florida and spending time with her dogs and horse.

With such an impressive CV it's hard to believe that she could have any unfulfilled aviation ambitions, or particular aeroplanes that she'd like to fly... "Sure I do," she replied, "I really like modern planes. I went through the warbird phase and I enjoyed that, but I prefer flying faster and higher in sleeker, sexier airplanes. I'd love to fly the new supersonic T-50 trainer, but I don't know that I'll ever get the chance to. But it's planes like that... that's the kind of stuff I want to do. I'd like to do some test flying, and

you never know what opportunities are going to present themselves."

There's no doubt about it, Patty is an excellent ambassador for General Aviation. But, what I really liked about her is that, although flying is in her blood (her father was an airline Captain, and her sister still is) she has a broad spectrum of interests outside aviation. On her website the home page features this Mark Twain quote: "She was not quite what you would call refined. She was not quite what you would call unrefined. She was the kind of person that keeps a parrot." And she does - a parrot called 'Buddha'!

Patty really likes the Beechcraft T-6B Texan II. (KEY - DUNCAN CUBITT)

