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WORK EXPERIENCE PATTY WAGSTAFF

The serious side of loops and rolls

As one of the world's leading aerobatic display pilots, Patty Wagstaff regularly performs at air shows, but also runs her own flying school, offering upset recovery training for corporate and airline pilots

What inspired you to pursue a competitive aerobatic flying career?

When I learned to fly I knew I didn't want to pursue a career in airlines or flying commercially – but I knew I wanted to fly. Competition and air show flying offered the challenge I was looking for. It was a fantastic way to take flying to the next level, and have a life around airplanes and people who love them. Aerobatics really combined the challenge and excitement I craved.

What is your role at your aerobatic school, and what is your typical day like?

I am the president of Patty Wagstaff Aviation Safety, which encompasses Patty Wagstaff Aerobatic School in St Augustine, Florida – our upset prevention and recovery training programme, which we partner with Simcom in Orlando, Florida. We also offer upset training to flight departments at their facilities. I also run my air show business, Patty Wagstaff Airshows, so I have to do a bit of everything: I manage our schedule, answer emails, organise bookkeeping, book air shows, promote the business, and take care of social media. Obviously, I don't have time to do all of the aerobatic instruction myself, so I have a great team of chief flight instructors. A typical day starts around 09:00, and I'm at the office until about 15:00. If I'm not flying, then I do other things like work-out, spend time with my animals, write articles. During air show season, I



Matthew Courtney

Wagstaff knew early on that commercial aviation was not for her

have to practice a lot to keep up my g-tolerance for hardcore aerobatics. One of the reasons I live in St Augustine is because the airport has been a centre for aerobatics since the 1960s, and we have an aerobatic box adjacent to the airport. We can NOTAM the box on a daily basis, and I can get in the air and get a practice done on short notice. The best thing about my business is that there is a lot of variety. I don't have a chance to get bored, and I meet fantastic people in aviation.

How do you encourage the next generation of aerobatic pilots?

Our school has started a few people in competition aerobatics, and we are really proud of that. We don't push competition on

anyone, but if they have an interest we will encourage them. We take every opportunity we can to encourage people, young and old, to at least try aerobatics to see how much it will improve their regular flying. I say: take a bite out of the apple and see how you like it.

What do you enjoy most?

Our aerobatic school attracts a great variety of students, varying from high-time pilots to student pilots. I enjoy our students so much. They all have one thing in common – they want to become better, safer, and more confident pilots. To see someone leave knowing that they will get more enjoyment out of their flying is a gift for us as much as for them.

Basically, I want people not only to be safer, but also to enjoy their flying more – and fly more.

What is your biggest challenge?

Finding time to do everything! Luckily I've always enjoyed my work and am energised by it, but there is only so much time.

What does the next 12 months hold for your flying career?

Along with the aerobatic school portion of our business, I am focusing on our upset training programme. We offer something that no-one else does – a chance for the corporate/airline pilot to get valuable upset training at their facility. For example, we will travel with our airplanes and instructors and bring the training to you. This can represent huge cost savings for any flight department, as they don't have to take their pilots off the line for more than a day, in addition to their travel costs. Our one-day course is short, and we believe very effective. Along with upset training and aerobatics, I'm flying at air shows including Sun 'n Fun in April, NAS Patuxent River, Maryland in June and the EAA AirVenture show at Oshkosh, Wisconsin in July. ■

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