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Discusses the King
Air 300 Series
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Pat Cannon over Monument Valley, November 1999.
The spire in the background is the "Big Indian."

TOP MEMORIES FROM PROP

I was thinking the other day that this will be the seventh series of PROP seminars that I've been involved in. While I wasn't there at the beginning, in 1982, my first PROP was 1996, and there have been a number of memorable moments since then. David Letterman loves to do lists, and I thought I'd share my top five memories.

5. June 23, 1999, in Reno, Nevada. For PROP 2000, we spend a day at Stead airport in Reno, Nevada

and flew the Reno Air Race course. Rich Wirth brought his Solitaire down from Washington and we flew a 3 plane formation around the 8 1/2 mile course. Tommie Batchelor flew Rich's airplane, Pat Canon was in the #2 position, and I was on the outside, destined to appear as the tail end Charley in the "race" on film. We hired a helicopter to video the flight, had several photographers on the ground, and the music video we produced had the feel of the air races themselves. They even waved



Rick Wheldon has over twenty-four years of aviation experience. He was the former manager of the demo fleet for Mitsubishi and an airline pilot with international experience flying with Braniff and Pan American. Rick holds an ATP and has accumulated over 7500 hours of flying time.

a checkered flag as we flew past. Of course, while the unlimited racers fly the course at over 450 knots, we would have finished a poor last since we were only indicating 160 to 180 knots. Rich also brought his T-28 down to Stead, and afterward he and I went up for some acrobatics. That was the only time I've been upside down in an airplane since I got out of the Navy in 1978. I'd forgotten how much fun it was, but the techniques came back pretty quickly, since I have 500 hours instructing in the airplane.

4. October 29, 2005, near Bristol, Tennessee. For PROP 2006, we flew to Bristol, on the edge of the Appalachians, to shoot some air to air video with the fall colors in the background. Pat was in the Solitaire and I flew the Marquise. The best light for aerial photography is always at sunrise, so we arrived at the airport while it was still dark. Unfortunately, they were reporting ice fog in the river bottom where the airport is located, so we were earthbound until it warmed up a bit. Ten miles west of us, it was clear. Once the temperature exceeded freezing, we took off and worked the ridges to the east. I think we missed the best shots because of the delay, but, as it turned out, we did get some good video and stills because the fog underneath contrasted beautifully with the greens and reds of the ridges.

3. Oct 20, 2003, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. For PROP 2004, we did a technical demonstration on the importance of the rudder during engine failure. The MU-2 is like all non-centerline powered twin engine aircraft in that its ability to climb after an engine fails is directly related to the ability of the pilot to reduce drag. Much hoopla is made

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by uninformed pilots that spoiler deflection creates significant drag, implying that aileron equipped airplanes don't suffer this handicap. We demonstrated that spoiler drag was miniscule compared to the drag created by sideslip, that sideslip was controlled by the proper application of rudder, and that proper rudder input was the primary factor in achieving zero sideslip and best single engine climb performance. When filming this demo, the aircraft was placed in unbalanced flight, one engine at full power and the other at idle, with no rudder inputs and nearly full spoiler. Bank angles were 25-30 degrees, and Carol Mathews, the camera operator, had to hold on to the airplane with one hand, the camera with the other, and shoot video with the deck shifting between level and 30 degrees. It wasn't easy, but she made it work. For me, it was gratifying to be able to dispel one of the more common misconceptions about our aircraft.

2. August 29, 2001, in Washington State. For Prop 2002, we went to the west coast for our video shoot. Again, we started before sunrise, with the intent that we shoot Mt. Rainer at first light. Having spent the night in Portland, it was a typical overcast, drizzly morning. Pat and I joined up en route to Mt. Rainer, and the morning light above the clouds was spectacular. The shadows provided wonderful color contrasts, with the snow capped mountaintop and the clear blue sky above. Mike Barnes did the photography, and produced one of my favorite music videos.

1. November 3, 1999, over Monument Valley, Utah. This was my favorite PROP music video

and favorite MU-2 flight ever. We spent the night in Farmington, New Mexico, about a half hour east of Monument Valley, and again rose well before sunrise. Pat was in an F model that we owned at the time and his wife Carol was riding copilot. I was flying the Marquise. While loitering over Monument Valley, we caught the sun creeping over the horizon in one of those rare special moments, and got a wonderful shot of the F with the sun behind it in a starburst. Descending, we obtained spectacular video of the airplanes flying alongside the cliffs and spires that are so easily recognized from the old John Wayne westerns. At one point, Carol, using a cheap drug store point and shoot camera, snapped the photo accompanying this article, which turned out to be one of our best photos ever. After working Monument Valley, we traversed over to Lake Powell and flew south along the shoreline hoping to pick up some additional footage. Lake Powell is normally magnificent, but we arrived too late, the sun was too high, none of the footage was very good, so we recovered at Page, Arizona and had a great Mexican lunch. Prior to departing Page, we removed the arrows stuck in the side of the airplanes. Apparently, the locals were still a bit angry.

PROP has been a great deal of fun to produce over the years. I hope you've enjoyed attending as much as we have enjoyed producing it. We feel that the music videos have been as much a part of PROP as the technical and operational discussions, and have hopefully added to the learning experience. If you agree, come join us at PROP 2008. We'll have some more good videos.

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