

BEHIND THE HANGAR DOORS

Spins, impossibly tight turns, and rolls are just a few of the insanely impressive, and terrifying, maneuvers that this pilot conquers regularly. Having just completed his first air show, we explored his motivations and admirations for all that he is.

MEET JOHN “DREW” BLASE

Drew Blase is a man to be revered: retired from the Air Force after more than 20 years, husband & father, currently flying for UPS, and now taking on a new challenge by way of air shows. The 2024 Bremerton Air Show event was his first time flying in a show, and it proved to exceed his expectations.

From the time he was just four years old, Drew was fascinated with planes. For college, he opted to go with the Air Force Academy, and following four years there, he received a pilot spot to use his freshly minted pilots license on. He flew B-52s, B-2s, MC-12s, and U-2s, to name a few, and had a ball doing so. What some would consider stomach-churning, he loved. The thrill of going upside down, perfecting spins, and mastering fast maneuvers proved to keep him on his toes. Now, getting to share that with his five-year-old daughter, he is pleasantly surprised to see that she loves it, too.



Exploring the ‘why’ for loving these death-defying maneuvers, he cites the challenge of these acts to be a main component of his intrigue. Doing aerobic spins and flying 70,000 feet in the air is what he says to be “inherently cool.” Moreover, he loves to share what he does with all he can. While it may begin with his wife and daughter, he also shares flights with friends and those he meets along the way. Starting his journey in air shows allows for that much more eyes to discover the amazing world of flight.

DARING FLIGHT

With the experience that a man such as Drew holds, it may be shocking to hear that it wasn't a breeze to conquer the first show. Drew, like all other airshow performers, had to complete his airshow qualifications before taking flight. He completed his mentorship course in South Carolina at the American Sky Ranch, where he met fellow aviation enthusiasts and garnered valuable insight. He described having "mental flexibility" as one of the most valuable assets a pilot can have, allowing for a safety-first mentality rather than perfecting a routine. Coupled with an online community, Drew found that having the right connections can make a world of difference.

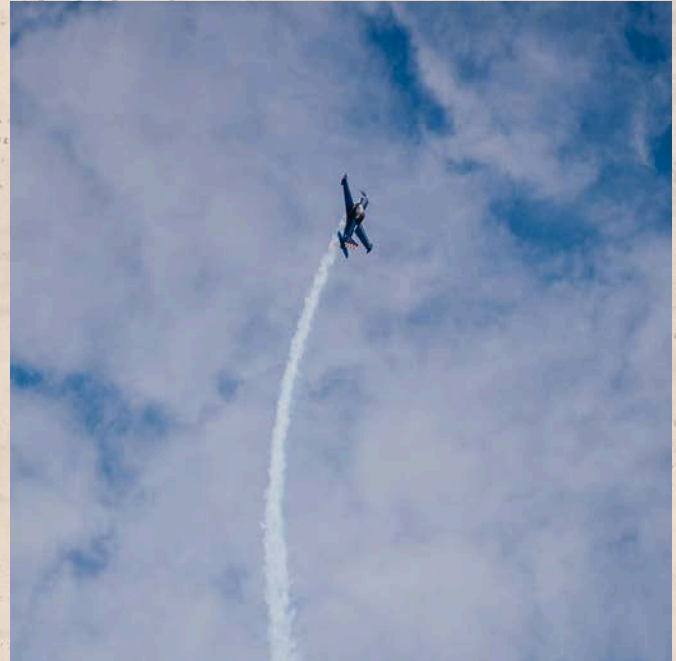
Once at the show, fellow performers Stephen Christopher and Todd Rudberg from the Undaunted team helped Drew settle into his role, and Drew later expressed that with a community as tight-knit as that of air shows, the people you meet start to feel like family. He also said that Bremerton National Airport ended up being the perfect fit as the venue for his first jaunt into the air show world because it's "small enough to feel at home," making it a more personable experience.

For his first show, he flew at just 800 feet, but that's not where it'll end for him. His next clearance will be for 500 feet, and then 250 feet, before hitting 0 feet. He hopes to attend 3 to 4 shows a year, balancing his newfound work as an airshow pilot with that of his professional work flying for UPS. He cites UPS as being a practical job, allowing him to fly while also supporting his family. In the future, he could see himself attending airshows as far as Utah or northern California. While he felt his time in the Air Force made the biggest difference for those around him, he also believes that airshows and even his job at UPS give him a chance to continue giving back to the community. In pursuit of continuing his airshow foray, he is currently working on building his social media presence. His aim? To promote aviation and make connections.

As if Drew's story hasn't been impressive enough thus far, he is still seeking more. He is currently working on mastering the art of formation flight, and even has interest in competing in aerobatics. He wants to explore smaller, tighter turns and focus on the precision required for a smaller airbox.

COMMUNITY AT THE CENTER

Occasionally, people with such tall accolades can build a bit of an ego, rightfully so. But with Drew, all one can see is his adoration for his wife, daughter, and flight. He chose his plane, a Marchetti painted as a shark, because it was one that fit the bill, being small and fast enough to do his impressive tricks while maintaining use as a practical family vehicle. The side-by-side seats allow him to share with those he takes on flights, one of the main selling points. His



family hopes to branch out more with their trips in the Spring, and in the meantime, Drew is methodically studying and sorting out any potential issues of this relatively new-to-him plane. They particularly love finding niche little places, wanting to explore the Orca Islands, Canada, and even Portland.

Drew is a man who finds value and knowing as much as you can ahead of a situation. The relationships he has built have helped him immensely, including the ones he fostered with a promoter at Seafair and that of the Airboss from last year's Bremerton airshow. He reflects that young him would be proud of himself as he is today and that he is greatly enjoying the "bubble of demonstrating." He also regularly attends Oshkosh and finds value in mentoring those coming after him. He believes his daughter will one day follow suit as well, and the most exciting gift from her recent fifth birthday was doing a roll with Drew.



Surprisingly, Drew does not consider himself to be an extrovert. He reflects that he was surprised by his "alter ego" that came out on the practice day for the Bremerton Air Show. Surely those around him did not notice, though, because Drew demonstrates himself to be nothing other than someone with community at the forefront of his mind. Case in point, Drew is even considering flying for nonprofits if he is able to appropriately balance his time to do so.



While this impressive pilot reiterates that he is "just here for the ride", he does have advice for aspiring pilots or those looking to breach airshows. His first piece of advice is simple: be stubborn. He says to go for what you want and be willing to make sacrifices. There are grants, schools, and multiple paths one can take to become a pilot if that is truly their goal. Next, he sites networking at various shows to be a wonderful way to enter the community. He urges people not to be afraid to talk about their dreams. As someone who has done the full spectrum of flying, from a career in the military to now pursuing hobby flights, such as airshows and competitions, Drew is

someone with stories to be revered. In the meantime, we hope you'll consider how you can take your own passions to the next level.

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