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“We will go higher”

by Colin Bane

NAA's Most Memorable Records Awards Luncheon

The National Aeronautic Association honored the exemplary group of record-setting aviators featured in the March/April 2007 “Most Memorable Records of 2006” issue of AERO at an awards luncheon in Crystal City, Virginia on June 26.

“Congratulations to each of the winners, and let’s congratulate their competitors too, because that will keep them on their toes for next year,” joked NAA Chairman Walter Boyne. Then, on a more serious note: “None of this will be news to any of you, but we ought to reflect that record-setting has been important to aviation since 1903.”

Setting the tone for the event, Boyne explained the larger importance of aviation records to the NAA, the aviation industry and to the general public, noting the political and social effects the great records in aviation history have had.

“Records do more than determine who goes the highest or who goes the fastest,” said Boyne. “If you think of things that moved aviation forward, you need to go back no further than 60 years and Charles Lindberg’s great flight. His flight united aviation and made the country conscious of it. Or turn to 1931: The British were about not to compete in the Schneider Trophy race and a wonderful woman named Lady Houston offered 100,000 pounds for the development of an engine which would enable Great Britain to win it. That engine became the basis of the Merlin engine. Without the Merlin engine, there wouldn’t have been the Spitfires and Hurricanes which won the Battle of Britain. So records have political effect as well.”

Boyne also voiced his hope that the pursuit of new aviation records

would help solve some of the world’s most pressing current issues, including global warming, fossil-fuel dependency and rising fuel costs.

“We need to have records to aim for, to excite people towards making these innovations and improvements a reality,” said Boyne. “Remember: Flying needs records.”

Introducing the winners, Art Greenfield — NAA Director of Contest and Records — said, “The Most Memorable Records help us illustrate the wide range of aviation achievements that have taken place. The aviators we are honoring today are a very select group of people. Their accomplishments have been chosen from among more than 120 records that NAA certified in 2006, each one representing a historic moment in aviation.”

Most Memorable Records Award winners present at the luncheon included Dr. Bruce Kaufman and Matthew McDaniel, holders of the new record for *Fastest Time to Visit all the Hard Surface Public-use Airports in the State of Wisconsin* — 102 airports in total, in just 16 hours, 42 minutes and 14 seconds.

“We’re very honored to be here, and very surprised to be amongst all these other amazing aviators,” said McDaniel. “Most of all, for me personally, is this guy right here: Bruce Kaufman is a pediatric neurosurgeon at the hospital we raised money for and a great friend of mine. I’m honored to have been asked to teach him how to fly a Cirrus and to have had him as a partner in setting this record.”

Such partnerships became a theme of the event, with recent Oklahoma State University graduates Tom Hays and Dustin Gamble on hand to accept the Most Memorable Record award for

shattering the aeromodel duration record with their “Dragonfly” model, pushing the mark to 12 hours, 21 minutes and 40 seconds. Hays and Gamble thanked each other, their student partners on the project, and also the professor who inspired them and made the project possible.

In a final, powerful tribute to the worth of a good partner in aviation, Einar Enevoldson spoke with great admiration of his partner, Steve Fossett, accepting the award on behalf of the duo whose Perlan Project used a mountain wave in Argentina to raise the bar on the glider altitude record by 1,718 feet, to the stratospheric height of 50,727 feet.

“I should really quote Jerry Garcia here,” joked Enevoldson, who first entered NAA’s record books in 1958, again in 1988, and is planning something massive with Fossett for 2008. “What a long, strange trip it’s been.”

Enevoldson noted that the Perlan Project record set in 2006 is merely the beginning, suggesting that Phase II might take the duo as high as 100,000 feet in a new, specially-built glider.

“Even though it was not ideal conditions on that day, we managed to gradually wander up to these altitudes,” said Enevoldson, recounting his adventure for the enthralled luncheon crowd and riffing off of Boyne’s earlier comment that records are about more than just who goes the highest. “We’re still looking over all our data from the first flight, but it looks like we could have gone considerably higher if we hadn’t been getting kind of cold after 5 hours up there in those suits. We decided it was probably time to come home and figure out an easier way to go higher. And we will go higher.” ■