



ROB HARRISON

Straight & Level Not Part Of His Act

That Rob Harrison would be popping in and out of puffs of white smoke, spinning, diving and twisting through the air in a specially built monoplane, repeatedly contorting his body to resist up to eight times his body weight in pressure, was unthinkable on that first flight.

Then, his Dad, a career Naval officer, was at the controls of a Piper Cub, and 6-year-old Rob was scared.

Now, nearly six decades later, the Claremont, Calif. resident, better known in airshow circles as “The Tumbling Bear,” remembers that first flight. Remembers, sure; dwells upon it, no.

There’s the next show, the next new move, the next generation he hopes to pass along his positive attitudes on experimentation and achievement.

The Tumbling Bear, has been a marquee airshow attraction since 1993 when he made the decision to embark on a new career after 28 years with the United States Forest Service.

The rarely-seen tumbles and gyrations of his bright yellow Zlin 50LX are now his trademark in the sky. The maneuvers are best described as gyroscopic, created by the gyroscopic effect of the engine and propeller.

None are more enthralled with his airborne acrobatics than the kids; in turn, their reactions seem to give Harrison the most enjoyment. Harrison added a new feature to his Web site called KidsLink.

Wherever the show, he typically is surrounded by youngsters after touching down. He hands out collector cards, pins, washable tattoos and other personalized giveaways.

His 12-minute routine is taxing; two a day are exhausting. He repeatedly uses all his strength to brace his body.

Rob earned a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering at Oregon State and a law degree from La Verne (CA) University. He added a certificate in flight test engineering from the University of Tennessee Space Institute and an FAA Statement of Aerobatic Competency, which allows him a waiver for unrestricted aerobatics.

He is also an Aerobatic Competency Examiner, or ACE. This puts him in select company. “There might be 100 active ACES who are allowed to license others to perform in airshows,” Harrison explains.

Harrison traveled to the Czech Republic, graduated from the Zlin Air School's advanced aerobatics school, and ordered his own edition of the plane.

The plane is his Zlin 50LX, designed in the Czech Republic to compete in European and World Championship flying competitions. Aided by a U.S.-made engine, the Zlin repeatedly defeated all comers in the 1970s and 80s. It came in a box - assembly required.

For more information on Rob, airshow schedule, video and photos log on to www.harrisonairshows.com or call 909.626.7442.