

WAUKEGAN AIR SHOW

In 'plane' English, it was a great show, eh?

Record crowd turns out to see Canadian Royal Air Force Snowbirds

BY LONG HWA-SHU

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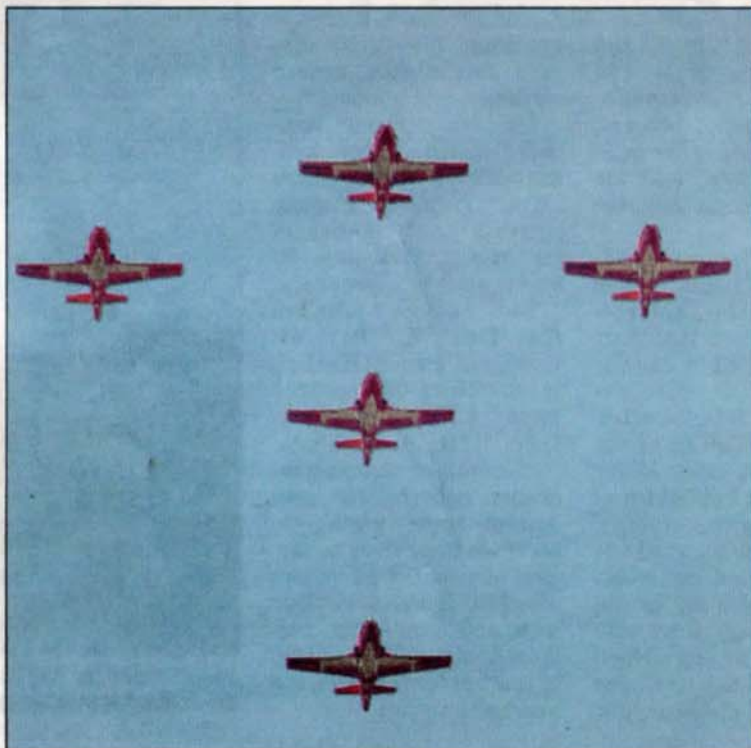
With the famed Canadian Royal Air Force Snowbirds as the main attraction on a comfortable, sunny, fall-like Saturday, this year's air show in Waukegan drew the highest-ever turnout in the show's history, according to its organizers.

As crowds gathered at Waukegan Regional Airport, the deep blue sky, softened by gently sailing clouds, was suddenly dotted with sky divers, sending people to crank their necks for more spectacles. Soon, a plane was doing dare-devil acrobatics, much to the delight of the on-lookers. There were stunt flights by the Navy F-18 Hornet, the Team Aerostar, the wing walker and several others.

But the best of the show was that of the precision flights by the Canadians. The Snowbirds' nine CT-114 Tutor jets, painted white over maple red, wowed, stunted and certainly raised the hair of many in the audience with various formation demonstrations, solo passes, and vertical and horizontal maneuvers and acrobatic. The versatile Tutor jets are said to be mainly used as trainers by the Canadian Air Force.

"We expected to have as many as 30,000 people at the show, our 11th year," said Grant Farrell, president of the Waukegan Regional Air Show Inc., which hosted the "Wings Over Waukegan" show. The turnout last year was 20,000 people, he said.

The main reason for the dramatic



After finishing their routine, the Royal Canadian Snowbirds regroup and fly east. | ROB DICKER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

increase, he emphasized, was the Snowbirds which he described as a "real, major jewel."

"It took us three years to get them to come here," he said, pointing to the paper work, the red tape and the preparatory work involved in inviting the celebrated group.

The Snowbirds, as many showgoers would like to think, not only brought a spectacular show to Waukegan but also welcome cool Canadian air as a present. Although the day was drenched with sunshine, the temperatures hardly got higher than 70 — perfect for the event.

Among those who enjoyed the outing were the Bakers from Wadsworth. Keith Baker brought his wife, Jennifer, and their 3-year-old son, Connor, to the show.

"Our son loves airplanes," she said.

As the national anthem played over the loudspeaker, the father told his son "to put your right hand on your heart." The boy dutifully obeyed.

Paul Szymczak of St. Charles broke into a broad smile as someone snapped a picture of him with his son, Bryce, 3, in front of a shin-



The photography section of the Wings Over Waukegan air show takes aim during an airplane's flight. | MICHELLE LAVIGNE - FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

ing U.S. Air Force F-86, known as a Sabre jet which was used during the Korean War.

"It's a historical plane," he explained of his enthusiasm.

"The plane is based here," said Steve Kirih, pointing out it is one of the collection of the War Bird Heritage Foundation at the airport.

Kirih of Moline, a pilot, said he had flown the plane back to Waukegan earlier from an air show in Davenport, Iowa.

"It's on every pilot's dream to fly this beautiful plane," he added.

Among other vintage planes on display were a U.S. Navy bi-plane, a U.S. Air Force propeller-driven fighter nicknamed "Bad News," a

U.S. Army plane, nicknamed Baby Duck with five Swastika symbols painted on its side just below the pilot's window, meaning it had downed that many German planes during World War II.

The Canadians came with 11 planes, although only nine were used in the show, according to Capt. Thomas Edelson of the Snowbirds which is based in Moose Jaw, north of North Dakota. The two others apparently were kept as reserves.

"Waukegan is a great place to come to," he said, adding, "Every place we go, the crowds always like the show we put on."

"We would certainly want to come back," he said.