

Off the Top

Don't Forget the Announcer

Your Best Friend.

BY FRANK KINGSTON SMITH

It's the person who represents your show to the public from a time well before the opening act lifts off until the final act has safely landed and your spectators are rushing to the parking lot to become part of an enormous traffic jam.

An air show, while not brain surgery, is still an amazingly complicated event, compounded by a plethora of variables.

Prime is the weather, which cooperates by degree — sometimes picture perfect, sometimes overcast from very high to 400 feet, and sometimes unflyable with heavy rain or fog, even crosswinds in the extreme. To be considered are the

pilots' capabilities and health, geographical conditions such as altitude and density altitude, runway length, natural and man-made obstructions, and physical layout of the airport. There are legal constraints of separation between performers and such things as occupied houses, highways and other airports.

And then, there are people attending the event. Management wants everything to roll without a hitch. Sponsors, who have shoveled varying amounts of cash and services into the support of the show, would like to be recognized at least as many times as the marketing department has promised them. And the spectators, who may have laid out a wad of dollars just to make it through the gates, want to see an entertaining and exciting show.

The flying acts generally are concerned with about fifteen minutes of onstage time. Many performers are seen walking through their acts on the ground, deep in concentration, well before

they mount up to fly. Some will come to the airport early and actually fly their acts before the gates open. Some do both.

Then, there is the announcer. This is the person who must be prepared to know everything about every performer, without resorting to reading the program aloud; everything about the sponsors, some of whom are keeping track of how many times they are mentioned; the geography of the region including the location of towns and major roads in relation to the airport; where medical, lost and found, drinking water, cool-down showers, and informational facilities are located; the location of sponsors', performers', and autograph tents and when people will be there; giveaways and drawings to be performed during and after the show; how to get back to the parking lot and basic traffic management after the show is over.

That's all.

Oh, and the announcer has to be somewhat versed in the show's emergency

plan in the unlikely event that something goes awry.

Knowing this, and having announced air shows since 1977 — still junior to several announcers in our membership — I can attest to the fact that most announcers wince when a show representative calls them and says: "We can't afford an air show announcer." Subsequently a sheaf of papers is handed to a disc jockey or to what the military refers to as "local assets." Translation: a junior officer who knows better than to say "no" to anyone — who fumbles through what he has in hand. If landings equal takeoffs, management says the show was perfect.

As air show announcers — there are about thirty of us — we send out "needs" lists to the shows where we will perform. If they seem long, it is only of necessity, beginning with to whom we should report upon arrival, where we will be staying, maps or diagrams of how to get to the motel and back, and some idea of briefing times, show times, and social events at which



