

EXTREME PHOTOGRAPHY

CAPTURING ALL THE ACTION AT THE FORT WORTH ALLIANCE AIR SHOW



BY JIM WILSON

THE FORT WORTH ALLIANCE AIR SHOW IS DESIGNED FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

The digital revolution has the photographic community growing by leaps and bounds. One only has to scan the crowd line at a venue like The Fort Worth Alliance Air Show to see that thousands of people are investing considerable time and money pursuing their photographic passion. Constantly changing technology enables enthusiasts to capture images that were difficult to nearly impossible just a few short years ago.

The planners, organizers and sponsors of The Fort Worth Alliance Air Show recognized this trend several years ago. Each year they expend

considerable effort toward the goal of making their event one of the most photographer friendly venues in the country. Incorporating elements like Photo Pits where enthusiasts can enjoy a “show center” perspective in the company of fellow photographers. Photo Tours led by seasoned professional photographers are designed to allow ramp access in the best early morning light, before the day’s crowds arrive.

So, with all those opportunities available, let’s focus.....get it :).....on the techniques that will allow you to bring home a camera full of striking images.





Air show performers flying propeller driven aircraft present different photographic challenges and opportunities. We've all seen images of planes where the subject is obviously in flight, but the prop is dead stopped. This effect, while it takes all the life out of a photograph, is understandable. Naturally, the photographer anticipates fast action and ramps up his or her shutter speed in an attempt to make sure they get sharp captures. The result is a sharp image with no appeal, not what most people are after. Today's high performance aerobatic aircraft can be

photographed using shutter speeds around 1/320th of a second and slower. The faster your shutter, the more you'll slow the motion of the prop. Of course, the holy grail of aviation photography is capturing a "full disc", while keeping the rest of the subject razor sharp. This takes shutter speeds below 1/100th, accurate and smooth panning skills, and a measure of luck. When you nail one of these, it's very gratifying.





Developing a smooth, consistent panning technique.....

Whether you're photographing jets, propellor driven aircraft, or really any subject that is traveling horizontally or vertically out in front of you, keeping your lens centered on that subject and moving with it at a consistent, synchronized rate of speed, is critical to capturing a sharp image. This is basically the same hand-eye coordination that hunters develop. You can have that shutter set to supersonic, but if you don't "pan" with your subject and maintain your composition, you won't like the images that result. Flipping the coin, if you develop a very accurate and smooth panning technique, you can drop shutter settings down to slower and slower numbers, achieving stunning images in which the subject is razor sharp, and the

background is a whoosh of motion and color. Yes, it takes lots of practice, but the results are well worth the effort.





Light, It's All About The Light.....

We are light chasers, constantly in search of the perfect color, direction and intensity of light to compliment our subjects. Light changes constantly during the day from the first rays on the eastern horizon to the last glow in the west. Sometimes we are able to choose the time and place that will give us perfect light, but many times we find ourselves at it's mercy, with very little control. Some air shows have perfect light in the morning hours, others favor the afternoon light. Rarely is an air field oriented so as to complimentary lighting at both those times. The runways at The Fort Worth Alliance Airport run north and south. This orientation gives photographers spectacular dawn, morning and sunset lighting, but will challenge you to sharpen your shooting skills in the mid afternoon hours, as you find yourself shooting into the light. So, should you go get a Coke and a Brat and sit out that section of the day? No, keep shooting, some of the best aerial action of the day occurs during the time frame we are talking about. Just change your style a little and photograph the subjects as their performances put them in positions where they are flying toward air show center from directions that don't put the brightest lighting directly behind them. The accompanying image was taken in the exact conditions we are discussing and the light is beautiful. Watch the performers as they change directions and capitalize on the changing light, using it to your advantage.



Military Jets Offer Dynamic Photographic Possibilities

The military demonstration teams present wonderful, but challenging photographic opportunities both in flight and on the ground in static displays. On the ramp you'll be able to capture numerous perspectives that range from beautifully

graceful, to menacingly lethal. In the air, if you can keep up with it, you'll have it all, instantaneous vapor, afterburner flames and

shock cones and for those of you that will be shooting video too, these subjects make for adrenaline pumping HD clips. Vapor images are elusive, I find that if I see the effect in my viewfinder, I missed capturing it, the events are that quick. The beautiful thing about shooting jets is that you can crank your shutter speed up to 500 or 1,000th of a second and shoot as fast as your buffer will allow. Should you be one of the fortunate photographers shooting with Canon's 1D MkIV, the buffer will continue to rip through shots at 12 frames per second for as long as you can hold your finger on the button. Only a few cameras have that

capability so a good technique is to pan with these fast moving subjects and anticipate when the best action is about to begin, then shoot in bursts.





While there is certainly no shortage of fast moving subjects at the air show, all the action isn't in the air. Keep your eyes peeled for the great opportunities that are taking place on the ramp. Ever changing light, aircraft, pilots and support crew and even the crowd standing with you at the show line, offer unlimited and unique compositions to the photographers who are looking.

