

Kent Pietsch and the Jelly Belly Airplane

Equal parts aviator, educator, and comedian of the skies

Air Show spectators around the world have been treated to the unique variety of acts performed by veteran pilot and consummate entertainer Kent Pietsch and his Jelly Belly airplanes. His shows, which include specialty acts designed to thrill audiences of all ages, showcase aerobatic stunts featuring airplanes that lose parts, engines that quit in mid-flight, and landings onto runways mounted on moving vehicles.

Kent has enjoyed presenting the fun of flight to air show audiences for 40 years. Kent's enthusiasm for flying started in 1967 when, at age 16, he completed his first solo flight. His passion turned into a full-time career just three years later when he began flying commercially. Kent noticed that many of his passengers were nervous about flying. Their concerns were often related to fears that an airplane might fall apart or its engine might quit in mid-flight. Motivated in part by an interest in allaying those fears, Kent bought his uncle's Interstate Cadet Airplane in 1974 and started performing at air shows. He began with his now famous comedy act in which Kent incorporated losing an aileron and a tire, and tossing other objects out of his airplane. His intent was to entertain audiences by showing them how not to fly. He then developed an act known as the Deadstick in which plane and pilot climb to an altitude of 6000 feet, and, after the pilot shuts off the engine and the propeller stops spinning, he glides the plane to the ground, demonstrating the ability of an airplane to fly with no power. Later, Kent and his friends perfected landing on a moving motorhome just for the pure fun of it and that attempt was soon incorporated into Kent's repertoire. In 2007, Kent took early retirement from a major airline to pursue his real passion of performing in the air show circuit. Around that time, Kent teamed up with Jelly Belly Candy Company and since then, his planes and landing vehicles have all featured the company's brightly colored jelly beans.

As a premier air show performer Kent strives to show the freedom of flight. While his acts push the limits of what he and his airplane can do, Kent adheres to strict safety standards making him a true professional in the air show field. Kent has been honored with the 2005 Bill Barber Award for Showmanship, and the 2007 Art Scholl Memorial Award for Showmanship. He is also proud to have been named an Honorary Royal Canadian Snowbird.

When Kent isn't thrilling air show audiences around the country, he pursues his other passion of aviation restoration in his own maintenance hangar in Burlington, ND. Along with his ATP and commercial pilot licenses, Kent also holds an Airframe and Power Plant Mechanic license. Essentially, he knows planes inside and out. In addition to the ongoing work required on his air show planes, he is currently rebuilding a 1929 Waco Taperwing Biplane and a Starduster too. Kent enjoys flying in air shows but finds that meeting the organizers, volunteers and fans is equally exciting. When he isn't in the air, Kent keeps himself busy juggling autograph signing and prepping his airplane for each of his three unique acts. Kent says, "It has been and continues to be a great ride!