

## The Man in the Machine



**Jon Melby** first learned to fly at age 8, when he created a pile of leaves in his Duluth, Minnesota lawn, climbed onto the roof of his 2 story home, and jumped like a bird into the leaves! He has been hooked on flying ever since. At the age of 12, he had the opportunity to meet the legendary airshow pilot Bob Hoover at a local airshow. Bob Hoover's sincerity and great personality gave Jon the inspiration to pursue his dream of flying. When he was financially able, Jon made it a goal to achieve his solo in a glider before his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. In only 8 flights, he achieved his goal by riding his bicycle 45 miles each hot Arizona July weekend to the nearest glider airport.

It was this type of determination that inspired Jon to purchase an airplane at age 19, and then hired an instructor to learn to fly it! He received his pilot's license by flying every day for a period of 3 weeks, yet eventually yearned to do more in an airplane. In 1996, he purchased a Pitts S2B Bi-plane and spent 3 months training to compete in aerobatic contests. During his first competition with 23 pilots, Jon achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> place, and in the next two contests he won first and second place, awarding him enough points to become the Arizona State Sportsman champion his first year of competition flying. It was then that Jon knew that aerobatics was his love. Now, flying "extreme" free-style aerobatics, Jon enjoys flying Airshows, so he can encourage both adults and children to pursue their dreams, much like Bob Hoover did for him.

## The Machine

The aircraft Jon flies is the awesome looking Black/Yellow factory built Pitts "Hangar 24 Muscle" Bi-Plane. With a 330+ H.P. six cylinder Lycoming motor and 3 bladed "Claw" Propeller, this aircraft has all the ingredients for a great performance. With a single seat and light weight, it provides a perfect platform for **flying high energy aerobatics!** It cruises at 195 MPH which makes Jon's "aerial commute" from show to show very quick. Fuel capacity on this aircraft is 28 gallons in the main tank, 5 gallon wing tank, and 10 gallon reserve used for fuel and/or smoke oil. He uses four on-board GPS navigation systems, providing moving map display. Jon flies his Plane to any show in North America.



## The Performance

With the wide variety of performers and aircraft on the airshow circuit today, Jon has chosen to concentrate on flying freestyle maneuvers in a modern bi-plane. The bi-plane has a classic look, but Jon keeps the audiences attention with his aggressive performance style. He takes time prior to the show to "mingle" with the crowd to meet and greet them. This allows him to build a relationship with the crowd, which in turn, makes the crowd feel as if they are part



of his performance. As he flies the routine, Jon can narrate from the cockpit the different forces he is feeling. He also describes the basics of how he flies the airplane, allowing pilots and non pilots alike to enjoy hearing while seeing what he is doing. After his performance, Jon is always available to answer questions and sign autographs as being "approachable" is the key to Jon's special relationship with the crowd. *Jon performs for Hangar 24 Craft Brewery based out of Redlands, California.*



## Jon's Military Background

Jon served 4 years in the Air Force in active duty and 7 years in the Air Force in the Reserves. Jon is a decorated combat Veteran and flew as an MC-130 Combat Talon Loadmaster. In this position, Jon worked closely with CIA, Seal Team 6, Delta Force, Army Rangers, and International Special Forces flying Top Secret based overt and covert missions. Many of the missions Jon flew were classified Top Secret. The Squadron Jon flew with is the 8th Special Operations Squadron, based out of Hurlburt Field Florida. As Jon states, flying Special Operation missions was some of the most exciting and dangerous work he has ever done. Jon is proud to be a Veteran and is always proud to meet other Veterans from any era or branch of military service!