

LA JOLLA VILLAGE NEWS

A NATIONAL AWARD-WINNING NEWSPAPER

Thursday, May 1, 2008



La Jolla Village News > Features



DON BALCH

A pilot threads the needle between two pylons during last year's Red Bull Air Races along the San Diego waterfront.

Red Bull ready to charge the San Diego city skyline

Johnny McDonald
May 01, 2008

One victory does not a title season make, but acrobatic pilot Paul Bonhomme's dominating performance in March at Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, is a great start.

The British Airways 747 pilot is setting his sights on the Red Bull Air Races, which he won last year, over San Diego Bay on Saturday and Sunday, May 3 and 4, at 1 p.m. He'll face a multitalented 11 other pilots, including 2007 champion Mike Mangold of the United States.

It would appear Bonhomme set a standard last year, but he missed topping Mangold for the title by a fraction of a second. Each had finished with 47 points, so officials had to go to the clocks to determine the titleholder.

As for Bonhomme's Abu Dhabi performance, he won by 6 and 7 seconds in the semifinal and title run-off against Austria's Hannes Arch.

Bonhomme revealed that he made some secretive adjustments to his plane over the winter. He declined to reveal details, but he said his team put "a lot of thought and effort" into getting the setup right for each track.

Others in the field include Americans Kirby Chamblis (2006 champ) and Michael Goulian; Britons Steve Jones and Nigel Lamb; Nicolas Ivanoff of France; Alejandro Maclean of Spain; newcomer Glen Dell of South Africa; Peter Besenyei of Hungary and Serge Rakhmann of Russia.

The action will take place between Embarcadero Park and Coronado Island. Last year, an estimated

50,000 watched the races. Each race will be broadcast on Sunday evenings on Fox Sports Network starting in July.

Inflatable pylons, or air gates, define the course, a creative and complex feat of engineering by Austrian designer Martin Jehart and the team at Bellutti, an Innsbruck-based firm. The company uses a spinnaker rip-stop nylon, an extremely lightweight and flexible material normally used to make sails for boats. Circular pieces of fabric were sewn together to form a column. The fabric rips immediately when hit without any detrimental effect to the plane or pylon.

A new design allows for rapid replacement in the event of damage. If one part of the pylon is damaged, only that section needs to be replaced. A team of specialists is on stand-by to repair the damaged pylon.

Preceding the air races on Saturday, May 3 at 10:30 a.m. is the Sea & Air Parade, the kickoff event for Fleet Week San Diego, with six Navy warships passing in view on San Diego Bay.

The parade is one of 20 yearly programs mounted in tribute to the military. They include a Baseball Classic, scheduled this year for Aug. 25; the Star-Spangled Salute Sept. 20; the Coronado Speed Festival Sept. 27 and 28; and the Miramar Air Show Oct. 3 through 5.

Event officials said the parade warships include one cruiser, a frigate, two destroyers and two amphibious ships. Additionally, two Tall Ships, the Californian and the HMS Surprise, will engage in a mock gun battle.

The ships will sail from Point Loma through the bay, with the show's center between the USS Midway and Seaport Village.

Show officials encourage spectators to view the parade from Harbor Island for the best view.

Eventgoers can also see the action in Coronado from the Ferry Landing, SDG&E Park and Centennial Park. Parking is limited.