

Aero GP.

Imagine that you are standing on the roof terrace of a bar in the Mediterranean, Malta to be exact, looking out over the ancient harbour. Whilst holding an ice cold beer, you look out to sea and see a small dot on the horizon. The dot grows larger, you hear a low rumble coming from the same direction, it gets closer and soon its apparent it's an aircraft.

The plane flies in towards land at very low altitude. It passes the bar within almost touching distance before going on to complete aerobatic manoeuvres above the yachts and watching spectators. This isn't just a one-off air display by a local squadron. This is the future of motorsport, this is Aero GP.

Malta

My story begins as I walk down the stairs from the jet which brought me to Malta International Airport earlier this year. A glorious weekend of flying was planned for the second race of Aero GP, the brainchild of Jeff Zaltman. He is a flying enthusiast who found the more established motor sports, such as Formula 1, were great but couldn't work out why no-one had taken the sport into the air.

"Aerobatics was around, involving lots of skill but it doesn't look as good with the backdrop of just the sky", Jeff explains. The aerobatics sports were often confusing to the general public, as there was no easy way of following who was winning. There was not a visual definition of first place until the judges revealed their scores. Aero GP takes this basis and brings in a visual race which makes it a much more interesting sport to watch. The spectators can see who is leading the race rather than watching a scoreboard.

Jeff's history is a mixture of business, the military and flying. He spent many years in the US Navy as an air warfare specialist and is a keen pilot himself, as well as having a great business background. He is one of those guys who appears to have limitless levels of energy and is never too busy for a quick chat. He is a great figurehead for the company.

His dream is to see Aero GP on the same level as Formula 1, with a multi-race series taking place in locations throughout the world. Considering the level of enthusiasm and commitment

he has to the company, I have no reason to doubt this possibility. Aerobatic aircraft competitions are nothing new, with a highly publicised series by a sports drink manufacturer and already being popular in many countries.

In fact, you may be asking where the Red Bull air-race comes into this which, on the surface, appears very similar to Aero GP. Jeff enjoys the Red Bull Air Race but is clear about the differences, "it's a competitor in a way but only like drag racing is to Formula 1. There are different markets. The major difference is that Red Bull is a timed lap, ours clearly is a race."

Red Bull clearly has the advantage of a huge brand and their history of running a large number of extreme type sports but, when it comes to sheer spectator enjoyment, Aero GP really does make the Red Bull Air Race almost boring in comparison.

The racing

Aero GP also has the advantage over Red Bull in that it brings other aspects to the racing, not just a time trial through a series of markers. Each weekend of the Aero GP will encompass a selection of different challenges for the pilot and his plane. They bring together a great mix of skill, speed and determination.

The racing is the main part of the weekend. The planes race head-to-head at up to 500kmph around a race track which is no larger than a normal motor racing circuit such as Silverstone. The racing is stunning to watch. Remember that a pilot can't just slam on the brakes like an F1 driver; it has to break the wind resistance in some way

F1 takes to the skies



"Aero GP really does make the Red Bull Air Race almost boring in comparison"

BY ANDREW RIXON

to slow down. In the race, the faster planes accelerate away and take the lead on the straights, they then have to take a much larger banked turn to scrub off the speed and make the next corner. In a race where the planes are unique and very different to one another, this makes the racing incredibly close and exciting to watch.

On top of this, Aero GP also introduces two new disciplines. The first brings back thoughts of Spitfires and Hurricanes flying around the British shores during the wars of past years. Aerial dog-fighting is played out for the spectators of Aero GP. The planes carry smoke canisters so when a laser records a hit on the other plane, smoke is released to signify very clearly for the spectator that a hit has been made.

Imagine being a spectator during the Battle of Britain and you'll get a rough idea how this looks. Whenever a smoke signal is released, signifying a hit, the crowd roars with appreciation. Again, this brings in Jeff's aim of a real spectacle for his spectators. A very visual sport that has clear goals for the competitors.

Another very visual aspect is the bombing runs. During the Malta weekend the submarine from U-571 was placed at one side of the harbour. The planes then take it in turn to fly in and drop a real pyrotechnic device to record a hit. When the pyrotechnic hits the submarine a huge explosion takes place to the obvious delight of the viewing public.

The racing is the highlight of Aero GP. As Jeff explains, "we're faster than F1 cars, on a tighter circuit, on a shorter circuit and just a few feet off the ground. It's F1 in 3 dimensions."

A true spectator sport

Having watched the racing in Malta I have to agree with Jeff's summary. The main advantage I found over watching normal race circuit motorsport is that the whole Aero-GP track is within view at all times. Unless you're in a helicopter, then viewing the whole of a racing circuit is impossible.

For the spectator, Aero GP really does offer fantastic value for money, simply because its free to watch! Thousands of people in Malta were lining the bay on the Saturday, enjoying the entertainment offered. They had a great chance to see planes and their acrobatics that are rarely seen away from an airshow.

The pilots

Considering the enormous G forces experienced during some of the racing, it is no surprise that the pilots are in an incredibly high level of physical condition. Most people will black out between 4 and 6 Gs, yet they hit over 7.5G in the racing. They come from all different forms of aeronautical backgrounds. Some fly commercial aircraft, some are ex-military and others have flying purely as a hobby that they've taken to the highest level. Britain's Andy Bickmore, one of the pilots in Malta, has over 15 years experience in aerobatics and has spent the last 4-5 years in formation flying training.

Aero GP is truly an international sport, both in terms of the locations of the races and the pilots. Britain is well represented, as is Slovenia, Hungary, Spain and other countries. The series is still very young and more pilots are expressing interest.

Location wise, many countries have already approached Aero GP with the intention of hosting a race. Many Middle-Eastern countries, Britain, mainland Europe and the United States have all stated an interest. Jeff's aim is to make Aero GP a household name worldwide, much in the same way that Formula 1 is.

The motor-sport world is always evolving. New race series are coming onto the calendar such as A1GP, which are becoming popular very quickly. I see no reason why Aero GP will not follow this trend and soon be a worldwide hit. Jeff Zaltman is the ideal person to take this forward, as he is unquestionably committed to the cause. With the support and backing of the pilots, he has everything he needs to succeed.

Investments

The beauty of Aero GP is that it is able to offer corporations and individuals a fantastic chance to be part of the series. The race in Malta was sponsored by BetFair. Aero-GP intends to continue with the classic sponsorship model for future events. However, the possibilities for sponsoring a team are endless.

"We're looking to sell franchises", states Jeff, "with up to 10 teams for private individuals, syndicates and groups. We'll manage the teams, we'll manage the aircraft. We'll match up a pilot to the sponsor, who can be as hands on as they wish". The whole company is geared around organising a custom

solution for the sponsor.

Aero GP can also offer revenue sharing arrangements, so not only does your investment give you the chance to gain worldwide coverage, it can also directly raise funds. The hospitality will be first class and the chance to be taken up as a passenger in one of the planes for a sight-seeing trip or maybe a bit of aerobatics. You can be sure you'll be well looked after.

For a company looking to expand their international audience, this is a great opportunity. The series has very close links with major sports television companies, so you can be sure of gaining excellent exposure. You can take your major clients up for a passenger ride



in one of the planes, then travel across to a prime viewing spot to watch the racing.

If anyone is interested in further information about investment opportunities, they are asked to contact Aero GP direct.

Contact Jeff Zaltman by email (zaltman@aero-gp.com) or via the website (www.aero-gp.com)

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Tribute

Motorsport is one of the most dangerous hobbies one can have. Sadly this was proved to be true during the Malta weekend when two planes collided in mid air. The end result was fatal for one of the pilots.

Gabor Vagar was not only one of the most talented pilots who has ever flown but also one of the most loved. He had been with Aero GP since the beginning. He was the only pilot to be awarded the title "Flying Ace" for his talent in the air.

His name, his legacy and his spirit will continue to fly high in the Aero GP

AERO GP

“Aviation’s equivalent to Formula One!”

Reuters

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The world’s fastest motorsport series

Imagine eight planes racing together at speeds of 500 kph around a circuit metres off the ground and from each other! This is AERO GP – a new sport that is breathtaking for both spectators and TV viewers alike.

The world’s best aerobatic and military pilots compete in this new global series where each

round sees several thrilling races take place, plus two competitive events where the pilots engage in air-to-air combat and compete in precision bombing and aerobatic feats.

AERO GP is unlike any other event and is a real competition, definitely NOT an air-show, nor a demonstration by just one plane at a time.

Global Exposure

With an established international TV audience reach already over 350 million people, and the opportunity to attract hundreds of thousands of spectators to events held in cities or tourist destinations, AERO GP offers the opportunity for excellent returns to potential Host Locations or Sponsors.

Own a Team

For a limited period there is also the opportunity to own an official competing team – plane, pilot and branding / naming rights – and enjoy all the marketing returns, hospitality and sporting thrills that team ownership offers. Enquire now for more details.

