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Purdue team places in top 20 in all-female Air Race Classic

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Two aviation students from Purdue's College of Technology placed third among college teams and 16th overall in the 32nd annual cross-country Air Race Classic.

The winners were announced Sunday (June 29) at a banquet in Mansfield, Mass.

Marie Janus, a May graduate from Valparaiso, Ind., was the captain of the Purdue Air Race team, and Juliana Lindner, a junior from Hanover Park, Ill., was the co-pilot. Purdue's was one of 33 teams total and three collegiate groups competing in the race.

Janus said they were disappointed with their finish, especially among the other two college teams. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla., placed first in the collegiate division, and Western Michigan University placed second.

"The leg from Frankfort, Ky., to Franklin, Pa., was definitely the one that brought us down from the top 10 and from winning the collegiate trophy," Janus said in an e-mail. "We had to deviate and land due to low clouds and wait for them to pass and break up. I'm disappointed we had to do this, but it was the right choice for that situation."

Lindner, who will be the team's captain next year, said the race started out well for them, but factors on the troublesome leg were out of their control.

"I think we ran the best race we could," she said.

Last year, Purdue's team placed first among college teams and fourth overall.

This year's race started in Bozeman, Mont., and continued to Miles City, Mont.; Aberdeen, S.D.; Mason City, Iowa; Decatur, Ill.; Frankfort, Ky.; Franklin, Pa.; Saratoga Springs, N.Y.; and Mansfield, Mass. The total distance covered was about 2,009 nautical miles (2,312 statute miles).

The Purdue team, flying a 2000 model year Piper Warrior III that the group named "Danica," won prizes for some of the segments on the journey. They placed second on the first leg (Bozeman, Mont., to Miles City, Mont.), first on the second leg (Miles City to Aberdeen, S. D.), second on the third leg (Aberdeen to Mason City, Iowa), and first

on the fifth leg (Decatur, Ill., to Frankfort, Ky.).

Janus, who was co-pilot last year with captain Katie Sparrow, has been involved with the Air Race Classic all four years while at Purdue, first as a ground crew member, then as a pilot.

Each Air Race Classic team flies a stock aircraft with no modifications. The teams are then assigned a handicap based on their airplane's predetermined average cruise speed.

Teams in the Air Race Classic win based on the efficiency and accuracy they exhibit in every aspect of the race. A team is rated based on its performance compared to its airplane's handicap.

Because of the nature of the scoring, it is impossible to gauge a team's performance in relation to other teams until the competition is over. It is even possible that the team that completes the course last could actually win based on the expected performance of its plane.

Purdue teams have competed in the Air Race Classic for the past 14 years, finishing first overall in 1996, the first collegiate team ever to do so.

Members of the Purdue Air Race team ground crew this year are Lauren Steele, a freshman in aviation technology from Lapel, Ind.; Kaitlin Mroz, a sophomore from Avon, Ind. Erin Cournoyer, a freshman in aviation technology from Webster, N.Y.; James Bearman, a senior in astronautical and aeronautical engineering from Milford, Ohio; Crystal Mathews, a senior in aviation technology from Indianapolis; Brent Sloan, a freshman in aviation technology from Fort Wayne, Ind.; Brian Futterman, a sophomore in aviation technology from Rego Park, N.Y.; Chris Leighton, a freshman in aviation technology from Ridgefield, Conn.; Halley Oleck, a senior in aviation technology from Moon Township, Pa.; Pascal Nguyen, a senior in aviation technology from Elkhart, Ind. and Prashant Tatineni, a graduate student from Newburgh, Ind.

The Air Race Classic is the longest-running all-female airplane race in the world. Its roots date back more than 70 years when the Women's Air Derby brought pilots such as Amelia Earhart, Bobbi Trout and Ruth Elder to an air race from Santa Monica, Calif., to Cleveland.

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