

June 28, 2007

Ben Davis grad guides plane crew

Crystal Mathews used skills in flying contest featuring female pilots from Purdue

By Richard D. Walton

richard.walton@indystar.com

Talkback | E-mail | Print | Share       

Crystal Mathews knew early she liked aviation, and that she was good at it.



 zoom

Purdue University students (clockwise from left) Crystal Mathews, Halley Oleck and Josh Stroka reviewed weather data at Purdue University Airport for two Purdue pilots participating in the annual Air Race Classic, a transcontinental competition. - Photo provided by Purdue University

weather.

"If there's a thunderstorm along your route, you don't want to go because then you're going to have to deviate around the storm," said Katie Sparrow, who flew the Piper with co-pilot and fellow Purdue student Marie Janus. "That's going to add more time."

That's where the ground crew -- which included men -- came in.

In West Lafayette, the group pored over weather data, warning of atmospheric trouble ahead. "We tell them what the weather's doing, what we think they should do," Mathews said. "And, between us, we make a decision."

The ground crew also calculated fuel burns to aid in refueling, made hotel reservations for the weary pilots and generally did the grunt work that enabled Sparrow and Janus to concentrate on flying.

The race began June 19 in Oklahoma City. En route to New Brunswick, planes made stops or flybys in Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, New York, Vermont and Maine. Flying hours at a time, the Purdue pilots battled heat and fatigue.

Still, it was worth it for two women accustomed to flat Indiana terrain. They crossed the Allegheny Mountains and had a picturesque view entering Canada. "You could see the ocean on your right and the inland on your left,"

As a girl, she steered a Cessna twin-engine plane over the San Francisco Bay area.

With a pilot friend of her dad's in the next seat, young Mathews -- her feet didn't reach the pedals -- soared past the Golden Gate Bridge.

"It was amazing to be able to control something like that, so high in the air," said the 2003 Ben Davis High School graduate. She added, chuckling: "They told me I did a good job."

Last week, Mathews put her skills to work as part of a nine-member Purdue University ground crew that helped boost Purdue's team to first place in the collegiate division of the Air Race Classic for the second year in a row.

With its Piper Warrior, the team placed fourth overall among more than 40 entries and captured the Fastest Piper Award. The honors were bestowed Sunday at St. John, New Brunswick, in Canada, the final stop on the multi-leg, transcontinental event.

The competition featured all-female pilots in single-engine, propeller planes. The teams raced not only against each other but also against time.

Each aircraft was assigned a handicap speed based on the plane's horsepower and design. The team whose average speed most exceeds its handicap wins.

While the Purdue aviation students are reluctant to reveal tactics -- there's always next year's race to consider -- there are a few basics. These include keeping a straight course, exploiting tail winds and avoiding bad

Advertisem



Advertisem



WAREHC
CRYSTAL
US-IN-Indi

Submissi

US-IN-Indi

Central C

US-IN-Indi

Automoti
Ray Skillm
US-IN-Indi

CUSTOM
AURORA T
US-IN-Leb

Advertisem



Tom Woo
Come in an
Acadia Clic

Janus said.

Though earthbound for this event, Mathews is a pilot with flying in her future. After her senior year at Purdue, she plans to work for a regional airline.

Mathews attended the awards banquet in Canada, and recalled the moment Purdue's victory was announced. "We were cheering really loudly," she said. "Every one was happy for each other."

It was reminiscent of another time, long ago, when the daughter of aviation mechanic Jim Mathews flew over the Golden Gate Bridge.

"She was all smiles," he recalled.

Call Star reporter Richard D. Walton at (317) 444-2804.

Tom Woo
Lexus Certif
Vehicle Mile

Tom Woo
Looking for
Appointmen
Premier VW

[View all](#)

Related

Latest he:

- Flying
- Life
- Hobbie
- New B
- Saint J
- Canad

Powered