Anderson air show attracts 50,000

KIRK BROWN
KIRK.BROWN@INDEPENDENTMAIL.COM

An estimated crowd of 50,000 watched a thunderous display of American air might on Saturday when an F/A-18F Super Hornet roared over Anderson Regional Airport.

The flight by the Navy jet served as the climax for the Bill and Jo Trent Celebration Anderson Regional Airshow. The free event, which began with the honoring of veterans, also featured helicopter flights, a high-speed truck, planes performing nimble acrobatics and tours of historic aircraft.

The air show was the first that Navy veteran Eddie Cox had attended since moving nearly 20 years ago from Jacksonville, Florida, to Belton.

"It brought back good and bad memories — mostly good," Cox said. "You can't serve three tours on an aircraft carrier without some bad memories."

The cool and breezy weather didn't prevent Brian McKowen from wearing shorts to the event.

McKowen, who moved a few months ago with his wife Sandy from Maryland to Pickens, is a self-described air show aficionado. He said he was looking forward to seeing the F/A-18F at Saturday's event.

Robbie Whitmire and his wife Allison drove from Central to attend the air show with her father and their 8-year-old grandson, Jaydon Brandt.

"It's awesome," Robbie Whitmire said.

"We're really enjoying it," added his wife.

Air show

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For them, the highlight of the event was Jaydon's opportunity to ride in a Huey helicopter.

"It was scary but fun," Jaydon said. "I liked it."

Dozens of veterans received warm applause from the crowd when they marched near a runway at the start of the show.

As the Westside High School marching band performed the national anthem, the Special Forces Association Parachute Team from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, landed at the airport.

The same team landed again later Saturday afternoon with "celebrity jumper" Bill Trent. Trent, 70, flew Air Force planes in Vietnam before working as a Delta Airlines pilot. He and his wife, who lived in Anderson, made the naming donation for the air show in hopes that the event will encourage young people to pursue careers in aviation.

Speaking from the cockpit of his Pitts S1S biplane, Clemens Kuhlig said his passion for flying began when he attended his first air show at age 7. He then guided his plane through a dizzying array of maneuvers that awed the crowd below.

Pilot Scott Frances also performed an array of acrobatic loops and rolls in his carbon fiber composite aircraft before besting Shockwave in a plane vs. vehicle race. The jet-powered Shockwave truck can reach speeds of up to 376 mph.

Scores of people toured two World War II-era planes at the airport. "The Tinker Belle" is one of the few C-46 cargo planes are still flying. "The Spirit of Freedom" is a restored C-54E transport aircraft that took part in the Berlin Airlift when the Soviet Union attempted to seal off the city in 1948.

Another popular attraction Saturday was the "Take Me Home Huey" sculpture. The restored air ambulance, which was shot down in Vietnam in 1969, features Vietnam-era decorations. It is meant to promote healing and awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

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People walk around in the CH-47 Chinook helicopter on Saturday at the Bill and Jo Trent Celebration Anderson Regional Airshow at Anderson Regional Airport in Anderson.