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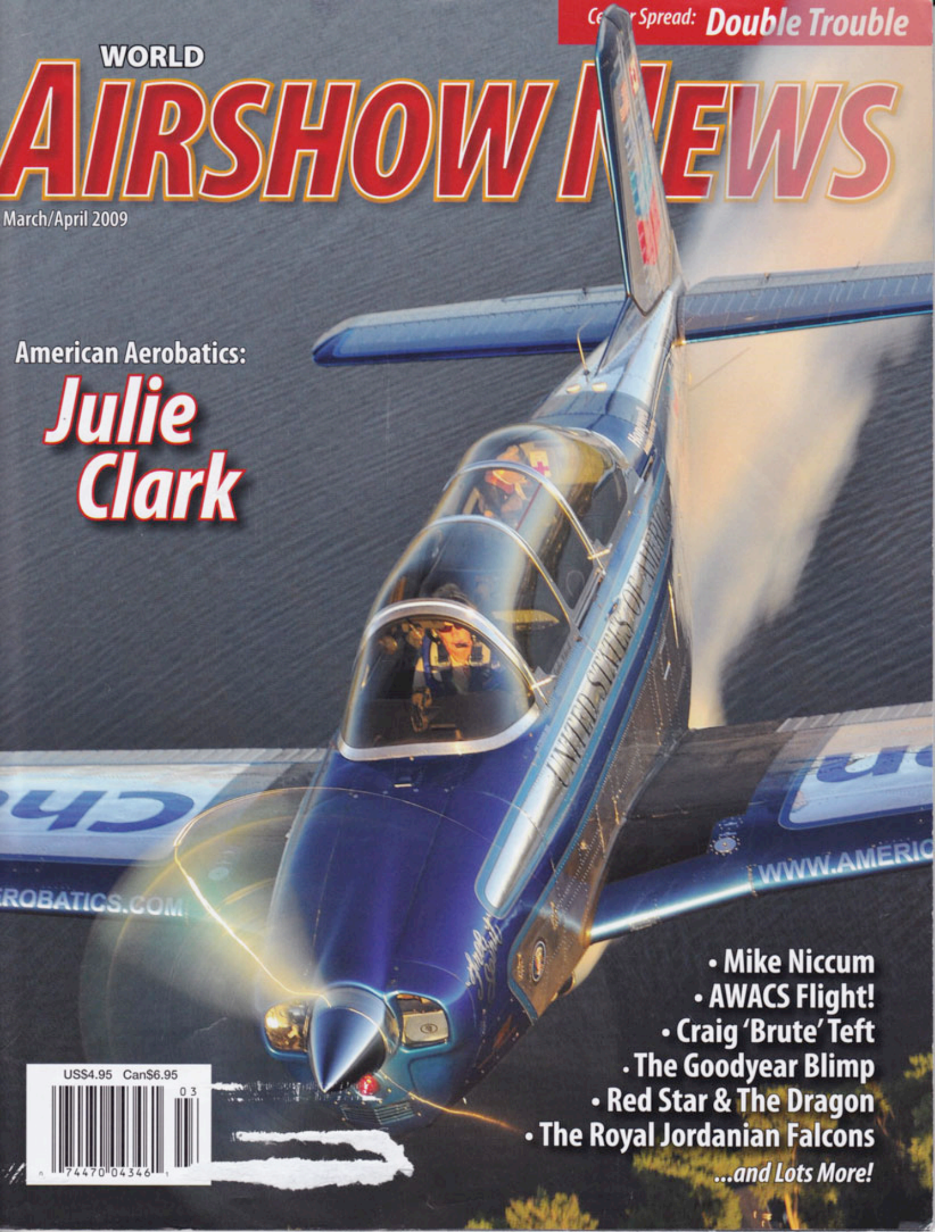
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AIRSHOW NEWS

March/April 2009

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MIKE NICCUM



By Myrna CG Mibus

A grass-roots pilot, aircraft mechanic, IAC competition pilot and judge, airshow pilot Mike Niccum is an all-around guy next door who lives and loves all things aviation. In less than three years on the airshow circuit, Mike is already respected by his fellow performers. His good-natured sense of humor, paired with his smooth and aggressive airshow routine, is earning him his place in the airshow business.

Mike's dream to fly started when he was only six. He was playing in the backyard of his family's home near Dayton, Ohio, during the

annual Dayton Air Show and heard something overhead. He looked skyward and saw a B-52 hooked up to a tanker followed by two F-104s. Mike watched the airplanes, soaked up the sound of their engines, and remembers that moment as the moment when he decided he wanted to fly.

Mike dreamed of being a fighter pilot. But, Mike jokes, "there were two reasons I didn't get into the Air Force, eyesight and algebra!" His non-aviation family didn't know how to guide Mike into civilian flying so, with no mentors to guide him, Mike kept his flying dreams at bay and went about life, eyes to the sky but feet firmly planted on the ground.

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Top: Mike Niccum in his Staudacher. Below: Mike Niccum (photos by Dick Schulz).



When it came time to choose a career, Mike decided to be a machinist. Life progressed smoothly until one day he caught his fingers in a machine at work. His mangled fingers led to a lengthy hospital stay, rehabilitation, and a chance to consider a new career. When his rehabilitation counselor asked Mike what he would like to do, the memory of those military airplanes prompted him to admit that he really wanted to get involved in aviation.

Mike immersed himself in aviation, earning his A&P license and his private pilot license. Immediately after earning his private in 1986, Mike started flying aerobatics in a Cessna 150 Aerobat. Looping and rolling an Aerobat was a far cry from the speed and precision of military flight, but Mike learned everything he could in that little plane.

He also discovered an airpark community and he and his wife, Marilyn, moved to Sky Harbor Airpark in Minnesota in 1993. As luck would have it, Sky Harbor was active with grassroots aviation and several aerobatic planes and pilots, including the summer home of airshow performer Julie Clark. With a home on an airpark and lots of aerobatic flying overhead, Mike didn't think the life could get much better. But it did.

Mike quickly gained a reputation for being a nice guy and a good stick. His neighbors soon found out he had a passion for aerobatics and offered to help him. One introduced Mike to aerobatic competition. Another volunteered to coach him. He bought a Pitts S1S and hit the competition season hard in 1999, learning every facet of competition – from flying to judging, to teching planes. By 2003 his hard work earned

him a spot on the 2004 United States Advanced Aerobatic Team.

In 2005, Mike decided to move into an airplane that could take him into the Unlimited category and airshow flying. He found what he was looking for in a Staudacher S-300D whose IO-540 kicks out 330 horsepower and is great for showcasing Mike's favorite maneuver, the rolling loop. He flew his first airshow in 2007. His routine is smooth and precise from years of critique in IAC competitions, yet is aggressive enough to wow the crowds.

"Flying airshows has been fun," Mike says. He enjoys meeting kids, telling them about his airplane and how his airshow career started with a dream. He likes getting to know airshow legends like John Mohr and Julie Clark and is constantly amazed at how nice everyone is. Mike feels fortunate that so many people have stepped forward to help him in his journey. "One thing I've found out is how many friends you have out there," Mike says of the people who helped him pursue his multi-faceted aviation career. "I don't know what I did to deserve the kindness that has been given me in so many ways."

Maybe Mike doesn't know what he's done to deserve kindness, but his peers and friends know. They recognize his hard work and dedication, they know he takes time to help other people, they see him talking to kids and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. "What I like about Mike is he's upbeat all the time," says Julie. "He's a great showman and a great pilot and a great competition pilot." To top it off, Julie adds, "I just think he's a really great guy!"



Inset: Mike taxis in. Below: Mike performs at an airshow (photos by Craig J. Haberlack).

