

Operators of the North American Harvard in South Africa

The Flying Lions Aerobatic Formation Team



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team logo

Brief History of the Flying Lions Aerobatic Team by Arnie Meneghelli

The Harvard or "Texan" as it was also known, certainly did do some operational flying, but its great role in aviation history, is that of the trainer. The Harvard design is so good and its handling characteristics so impressive, that eventually most of the world's major air forces used it to train their pilots. South Africa was no exception and with the help of the Joint Air Training Scheme, in 1942 we got our share. They were used for ab-initio training of all of our air force pilots up until 1995, giving the SAAF over 50 years of faithful service.

This was the moment many civilians were waiting for. In my specific case, my Harvard passion was kindled at an early age. My home and school were close to Rand Airport and all of my free time (quite a lot in those days), was spent at Rand Airport looking at these noisy birds being flown by "40" squadron members and being serviced on the spot.

The SAAF tenders came out and eventually, after a number of years, I landed up with five of these aircraft, some having come through the tender system, and others having being bought privately. The communal use of Hangar 34 at Rand Airport had brought me into contact with Scully Levin. One thing led to another, and the obvious outcome was the creation of an Aerobatic Formation Team. Thus, the "Flying Lions Aerobatic Formation Team" was born.

Our first hurdle, apart from all the training required for myself, was how the hell we were going to afford to fly a 3-ship team (it later became a 4-ship team!). It was obvious that with fuel costs, MPI's, engine and prop overhauls, tyre replacements, and brake wear and tear (the list never ended), we had to get sponsors! It was paramount to our survival. Our expenses were rising and our pockets were emptying. Academy Brushware (Pty) Ltd was at this stage helping finance, via a sponsorship, a small portion of the costs.

Our first stroke of luck came via Peugeot, who were in the McCarthy Group stable. We were fortunate in the sense that the MD was an ex Air Force pilot himself, and he saw the potential of a Harvard Team and what it could do to promote and market Peugeot. We had a most successful partnership with them from March 2000, and they opened the door for other sponsors to climb on board once they had seen the benefits.

Air BP was next to see the feasibility of a 3-ship Aerobatic Formation Team, and they came on board as a sponsor in April 2001. This was phenomenal for us - at last we had sponsors who had met most of our expenses, and at the same time in return received fantastic coverage via media and all the air shows and events that were organised. During December 2002, Nissan entered into discussions with Peugeot and eventually took over the Peugeot portion of the

sponsorship. To date we have been running with the three sponsors and have been very active in the promotion of these companies, namely Castrol Aviator, Nissan and Academy Brushware (Pty) Ltd, and we believe that it has been success all-round.

The Harvard presents beautifully with its great radial engine turning the prop and subsonic speeds generating a large amount of noise, and with smoke emanating from its smoke system, it has found a new role in life. From trainer to corporate marketing billboard! This goes to show that, with some lateral thinking, there are ways and means of saving our heritage, keeping veteran aircraft flying, and making them pay for their upkeep.

Without our sponsors, these Harvards would not be flying. The aircraft has been adapted from military to civilian life in the New South Africa, and we are enjoying this transition more than anyone is.

My feeling when flying with the Flying Lions Aerobatic Formation Team is one of pride, that I have been accepted and included to fly with professionals who are dedicated in what they do and are driven by a passion for flying, that is powerful and infectious. My team members have given me the feeling of safety. The discipline and level of professional skill that is practiced allows a sense of complete trust to engulf my senses, from our first briefing of the morning, to our de-brief after shows. We are more than just a team - we are a family and "Yes" there are discussions and adaptations to situations like in any family, and it is this that makes for the trust experienced.

Arnie Meneghelli

For further information visit [The Flying Lions Aerobatic Formation Team](#) website

For pictures and information about each of the Flying Lions Harvard aircraft please click on C/N

Home base	Model	C/N	SAAF number
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Rand Airport	AT-6D	88-14716	7475	
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Rand Airport	AT-6C	88-11622	7695	
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Rand Airport	AT-6C	88-10015	7188	
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Rand Airport	AT-6C	88-15863	7609	
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Rand Airport		T-6G	CCF4-520	
Did not serve with the SAAF		ZU-BVK	1754 Mozambique	



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Brussels Page 2

Photograph: Steve Alliso Photography

www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and Aviator 1st colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and Aviator 1st colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Brush and Aviator 1st colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Alliso Photography www.steve.co.za



C/N 88-10015

ZU-BEU

Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Brussels Aviator 1st colour scheme

Photograph: Theo van der Merwe



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Brussels Aviator 1st colour scheme

Photograph: Stephan Rossouw [SSP Photography](#)



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and Aviator 2nd colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and Aviator 2nd colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Brushstroke Aviator 2nd colour scheme

The SAAF serial numbers are a

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography

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Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and Aviator 2nd colour scheme

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography www.steve.co.za



Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Photograph: Steve Alliso

Sponsors Academy Brussels Aviator 2nd colour sche

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Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Sponsors Academy Bruce and
Crested Aviator 2nd colour sche

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Flying Lions Aerobatic Team

Photograph: Steve Allison Photography

Sponsors Academy Business and

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C/N CCF4-520

s/n 52-8599
Flying Lions Aerobatic Team
Sponsors Academy Brussels
bp Ultimate

ZU-BVK
Photograph

Home base

Model

C/N

SAAF number

Name

Civil reg

History

Comments

Status

Rand Airport

88-14716

ZU-AYS

Rand Airport

88-11622

ZU-BET

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Rand Airport

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