
9th Annual Cole and Rita Palen Memorial Free Flight Meet - Steve Sweeney

The Cole and Rita Palen Memorial Free Flight Meet was first held in 2005 to remember and celebrate the lives of Cole Palen, founder of the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, and his wife, Rita. Cole was a lifelong builder of rubber powered balsa wood free flight planes, as well as a builder and restorer of full scale aircraft from the dawn of flight up through the golden age of flight. What started as a casual get-together by ex-volunteers and pilots of the Aerodrome, has morphed into a full day of flying, food, and fun.

The meet is open to anyone with an interest in rubber powered planes built in the time honored tradition of balsa and tissue construction. The emphasis is on having fun flying model airplanes with friends both old and new rather than all out competition. The rules are lax enough to ensure flyers of all ages and different levels of building skills get a chance to compete in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. You might be surprised to learn that a newcomer with a simple stick model might beat a veteran builder with a plane he spent months building to win an event. Anything can happen at any time such as a broken rubber motor or airframe failure, so one can never predict the outcome of any event.

There are two basic types of flying at the meet. The first is "Open Flying Events" where your plane is judged on flight duration. It's a laid back competition as you fly at your own pace. You are timed by stopwatch, enter your best flight times on a time slip, handing it in at the end of the day. There is no rush, you can fly as many times during the day as you desire as you tweak your plane to get the most out of it. There are a number of different classes to compete in so whatever one brings, it will fit in somewhere.

The second type of flying is the "Mass Launch Events". The last one down wins. It's as simple as that. Depending on how many planes are entered, two or three heats might be run eliminating some of the planes with lower flight times. The overall winner is the last one down in the last heat. They can be wild and woolly as all the planes are launched simultaneously.

Each year at the Cole and Rita Palen Memorial Free Flight Model Meet, there is a special theme build and mass launch picked for the meet. This year's theme was "Flying Flivvers" which loosely translates to any homebuilt aircraft powered by converted automobile engines.

My family and I have been attending the meet for a number of years now and especially enjoy building for the themed events along with other builds.

Early on, for the Flying Flivver event, I decided to build a Corben Super Ace, a small homebuilt design from the mid-thirties that was powered by an engine from a Ford Model T. Using a Megow plan from the 1940's, it was a very enjoyable build and as they say it "flew off the board". I know some of you have seen it fly at the club field. It's a real floater! So many were building small peanut sized Pietenpol's, there was also some talk of a "Pietenpol only" event so I threw one together about a month before the meet. With a wingspan of only 12", I lost it twice in the grass at Stillwell during trimming sessions and pretty much gave up on finding it, but ultimately did. The Pietenpol mass launch never materialized, but I let my daughter, Kerry, fly it in the Flivver mass launch.

In the past we have held the meet at the Red Hook High School which has two really large

athletic fields and borders on a farm giving us an area over twice the size of our club flying field. Due to a personnel change at the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, it was decided late in the year that the meet would be held at the Aerodrome as some of the contestants had to be there to work or fly in the air show later that day. Unfortunately, this meant that all model flying would have to start by 7 AM and be over by 11 AM when the Aerodrome starts giving biplane rides before the air show which starts at 2 PM. Awards and prizes would be handed out after the show was over. This did make for a day that moved by quickly, but also meant that we would be treated to the full size air show later that afternoon. Being a much narrower flying field then we were used to, the trees might become a bit of a problem, so we were warned to keep the winds down or retrim to limit height. Mass launches would be held on the hour with individual timed flights being held whenever you could fit them in. It was also a "Women in Aviation Weekend" at the Aerodrome, with seminars by women pilots and building sessions for youngsters who wanted to build and fly their own rubber powered model in events created just for them. The models gathered quite a lot of interest from spectators, and more than one were brought out to the field to try their hand at flying a model.

Arriving at the Aerodrome just before 7 AM, we were greeted by a heavy fog that covered part of the runway and heavy humidity in the air. After chatting with friends and helping out my kids with their planes, I wanted to squeeze in my timed flights in the Pioneer class first before the mass launch events began at 9 AM. Before I even got my gear setup on the runway, the tissue paper on the 1911 Cessna's wings was already absorbing moisture from the humid air, getting baggy and getting wobbly. Try as I might, the best flight I could muster with the Cessna was a measly 29 seconds! Very disappointing, but I wasn't alone in my struggle with the dense air. I've never placed first in the Pioneer

Class (usually losing out to my own kids, no less) and it looked like this year was to be no different. I put my time sheet in the box, and hoped for the best.

I had a newly finished Sopwith Snipe to fly in the WW1 class that just wouldn't give a decent flight at all. I gave up on her before she got destroyed, and ultimately donated it to the Museum at the end of the day where she can now be seen in a glass case in one of the museum buildings.

The first mass launch of the day was the Fokker D.VII event. My entry flew really nice in the first heat coming in third winning me a spot in the final. Unfortunately, she also ended up about ten feet up in a tree. After some vigorous branch shaking, we got her down with only a couple small punctures in the top wing's tissue paper. As fate would have it, she just flat refused to climb in the final heat just cruising around about 8 feet off the ground in circles causing everyone on the field to duck every time she flew past, much to the delight of everyone. But she still managed a third place overall finish.

In the Boxy Bipe event, I over wound my plane's motor that made it stall instantly upon release, then dive like a lawn dart to the ground. The event was won by the Aerodrome's office manager with her first ever build! I think someone had timed her flight at 54 seconds, unreal for this type of design. She took home the "Best Flight by a Female Powder Puff" award breaking my daughter's three year winning streak of winning this award.

I flew my Super Ace in the "Flying Flivver" mass launch handing my Pietenpol off to my daughter, Kerry, to fly. A breeze was picking up, and upon launch the Super Ace climbed nicely into it and turned and started circling as the breeze carried her down the runway. Knowing that she was high up and the rubber motor was winding down, I took my eyes off her to see how many of my competitors were

still in the air while she started her glide portion of the flight. To my surprise, everyone was looking at my Super Ace as it was the only plane left in the sky! Unbelievably, first place was mine!

I had planned to fly my large Fokker Triplane in the Mixed Mass Launch which would take place at the beginning of the air show in front of the crowd. It's the last mass launch of the meet and anything that hasn't up to this point, crashed, been stepped on, imploded while winding, or now resides in a tree, is eligible to enter. Seeing that the now dryer air tightened the Cessna's tissue, I put down my Fokker and picked her up to give her one last chance. I gave the Cessna's rubber motor 950 winds and walked out to the starting line which is always a real mixed bag of planes.

After an introduction and countdown from the announcer, we launched. I got a good launch and watched my plane climb away from the swirling mass of planes that seemed to be everywhere. If you've never seen a mass launch, it's pretty exciting. Planes go left, right, straight up, and sometimes straight down or crashing into each other. The Cessna started its turn to the right, and flew in between two others as it flew back past us still climbing as it settled into the cruise part of its flight. As it made lazy circles overhead and drifted with the breeze down the runway, I could see another plane just behind it as if it was being chased. Not before long, it was just down to just the two of us. All the others were down and out. I thought for sure there was no way my wobbly Cessna was going to beat this plane designed specifically for endurance. But it looked to be holding its own. Both planes started drifting back down to earth toward the crowd. The Cessna

landed way up the field less than a second after but within a couple feet of its competitor. I was truly stunned.

By the time the award presentation was over, that oversized Cessna had taken three awards, first in the Pioneer timed class, first place in the General Mass Launch and the Award for Best Craftmanship. The Corben Super Ace took the "Flying Flivver" theme event going home with a nice laser engraved plaque, and my non-climbing, tree hugging Fokker D.VII, third in the Fokker D.VII Mass Launch. Even if I had come home with nothing but a garbage bag of broken planes, I still would be smiling at what a great day it was.

Interested in flying or just attending next year's event? Drop me an email at Stevie58@aol.com or grab me at one of the club meetings. I'll be more than happy to help you get started. There are some very easy but also competitive plans and kits available to get you started. So build some planes, bring the family and or grandkids to next year's Meet. I guarantee it will be one of the best days you have in this hobby!

Here are a couple photos from the Meet. Additional photos from the Meet can be seen on the LISF web site in the picture gallery.

Note: Steve's original pictures are posted in our [website's galleries](#), so you can view them in all their splendor. They include the pictures you see in this newsletter plus a lot more and are there waiting for you to check them out. They are in [sport flying](#), [contests](#) and [building](#). If these links don't work for you, go to the LISF photo galleries page, find and open the galleries.







Steve Sweeney, Corben Super Ace free flight model and Best Flivver award at the 9th Annual Cole and Rita Palen Memorial Free Flight Meet