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Speed in the Sky

By Lois DeEll

Spring on Vancouver Island is an indication that the Canadian Forces Snowbirds and F-18 Demonstration teams will soon fly over Comox Valley out of 19 Wing Comox for their annual spring training for the coming air show season.



My first introduction to the 431 Air Demonstration Squadron (Snowbirds) was in 1982, when my husband, Ken DeEll, became an instructor with 257 Ladysmith Air Cadet Squadron.

Capt. Emile deKoninck was the Squadron Training Officer. His son, Capt. Tristan deKoninck, was Snowbird No. 4, who was later killed in a CF-18 crash at Summerside, P.E.I.

In 1984, while attending an air show in Nanaimo, B.C., my husband met a former high school classmate, Capt. Bill Ryan, Snowbird No. 3. In 1989, when my husband was the Commanding Office at 257 Squadron, he met Major Dan Dempsey, Snowbird No. 1, and then, Air Cadet Mike French, currently Lieutenant Colonel and Commanding Officer of the Snowbirds, at the

Abbotsford Airport during a Snowbird demonstration. British Columbia Lieutenant Governor David Lam was the reviewing officer.

In 2016, I started to photograph the Snowbirds and CF-18s at CFB Comox (Airforce Beach). At that time, I met Capt. Blake McNaughton, Narrator/Snowbird No. 10, and followed the Snowbirds through social media.



In 2018, I, for the first time, and my husband, for the second time, met Lieutenant Colonel Mike French at 19 Wing Comox.

In the distance you can hear the distinctive roar of the aircraft engines as the Snowbirds and CF-18 prepare for takeoff to practise their routines.

With the snow-capped Coastal Mountains to the east, the Beaufort Mountain Range, Comox Glacier

and Mount Washington to the west and the water gateway of the Georgia Strait in between, the photography begins.

There is colour and speed in the sky. The aircraft manoeuvre skillfully with speed through the sky. The Snowbirds' CT-114 Tutor has a maximum speed of 741 km/h with their turbojet engines. The CF-18 has a speed of Mach 1.8 or 1,915 km/h

at 40,000 feet with its two General Electric F-404 low bypass turbo fan engines.

The public has the opportunity to view and photograph these training sessions from Airforce Beach, west of the base. Come prepared for all types of weather and arrive early to prepare your camera gear and choose your location. The 2018 show was on a sunny day with occasional fluffs of



clouds and a cool breeze blowing off the strait.

My lens of choice for aviation photography is a 70-300 mm telephoto lens, image stabilizer on. This lens gives me an advantage to photograph the aircraft that is directly overhead and directly in front, as well as the aircraft climbs in the sky.

I use autofocus tracking and continuous shoot and do not use a

tripod or monopod, which gives me the freedom of movement to pan the aircraft. I normally photograph jet aircraft with shutter speeds of 1/1600 to 1/2000 of a second with the widest aperture available and auto ISO.

There are no props on these aircraft so I do not require the slower speed to indicate movement. Ideally, I strive to photograph with the sun toward my

back and look for interesting angles to photograph the aircraft. All my images are shot in RAW format and post processed in Lightroom and Photoshop.

One of my objectives is to capture the aircraft showing the canopies and to visually see the pilot. Another objective is a symmetrical image, such as the triple decked aircraft. Upon speaking to other photographers at the air show, a much-sought-after image is to have the two aircraft canopy-to-canopy or wing tip-to-wing tip from opposing directions.

Sometimes during postprocessing you will notice that the moon has made an appearance in your image.

Some aerial performances are continued year to year. The team designs the formations and manoeuvres each season. These can include the Canada burst, heart, downward bomb burst, solo head-on crosses and their signature nine-abreast exit.

There are 21 nine-plane formations, 15 seven-plane formations, five line abreast, in addition to triple, dual and single performances.

The 2018 F-18 paint design covered the body and wings of the aircraft to celebrate 60 years of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). The paint design focused on lightning bolts, north-pointing sword, globe, silver



wings that represent the northern lights and radar sweeps.

The design is to symbolize NORAD's commitment to protect and defend the North American airspace and Canada's sovereignty. I describe this paint design as "eye candy" in the sky. The top view knife-edge pass of the F-18 displayed the elegance of the paint design and the

beauty of colour that flashed through the sky.

A favourite image is when a visible cloud of water forms around the F-18 as it moves at high speed through the moist air and is only visible upon post production. I was fascinated by the beauty and speed of this aircraft.

Photography is a continual learning process and practising for that



next perfect image. If you have the opportunity to photograph Canada's Snowbirds or the CF-18 Fighter Jet, take it. It is an adventure and your camera card will be full of breathtaking images. ❄️

Lois DeEll is a recently retired legal assistant from Crofton, B.C. She is a member of the Cowichan Valley Camera Club and has collected several awards both individually and with the club in CAPA competitions.