

Most Memorable Moments 2002

Of all the events capturing NAA's attention last year, the Association has chosen six as the Most Memorable Aviation Records of 2002.

Topping the list is the mind-boggling skydive by a formation of 300 people over Arizona on December 12. The team of divers, known as Arizona Airspeed, jumped out of 14 airplanes at an altitude of over 20,000 feet and maneuvered in clusters until all units were linked up in a spiral pattern. The skydivers were able to hold their formation for seven seconds—long enough for three judges on the ground to confirm that all flyers were really connected. The record-setting plunge came on the team's third attempt that day.

The fastest speed-over-a-recognized-course of the year was set by a crew of three—Sean Sheldon, Ahmed Ragheb, and John Mullican—flying a Gulfstream V across the Pacific Ocean from Tokyo to Los Angeles on November 7. They clocked out at just over 643 miles per hour, beating a record from 1984. The three pilots were operating one of the company's demonstration aircraft.

Bruce Bohannon beat his own record by climbing to 41,611 feet over California in a single-engine, homebuilt airplane, nicknamed Flyin' Tiger. Bohannon already held the altitude record for an aircraft in the Flyin' Tiger's weight class (1,102 to 2,205 pounds) but managed to beat his old mark by almost 11 percent. He performed his feat on October 22 at the annual exposition of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, meeting in Palm Springs, California.

Another achievement sure to be remembered is Steve Fossett's solo balloon flight around the world in June and July—the first successful flight of its kind. Fossett had attempted the feat five times previously, without completing it. As events worked out, this attempt—which began in western Australia and ended two weeks later in eastern Australia—set a record for shortest time around the world at 320 hours. Fossett piloted a Roziere-type helium balloon.

The Reno Air Races in September were the scene for a new speed record over a three kilometer straight course: 354 miles per hour. Taking the prize was Wesley "Lee" Behel, Jr., flying a Lancair Turbine IV-P. Behel beat the previous record, which had stood for 38 years, by almost 32 percent. He ran the course early on the morning of September 11, before the day's scheduled activities had begun.

A different kind of memorable record was posted on August 4 by Academy of Model Aeronautics member James Richmond, who managed to keep a rubber-powered model airplane aloft inside the atrium of Indiana's West Baden Springs Hotel for 47 minutes and 19 seconds. For the winning flight, Richmond wound the two-strand rubber motor to 1,960 turns, then launched the plane into the air. Approximately 23 minutes into the flight, the model achieved an altitude of 90 feet (the atrium's ceiling is 96 feet high). The model, which

Richmond designed and built, has a wing span of almost three feet and a variable-diameter propeller of 26/22 inches.