

Things are looking up



SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO

Attendees of the 2005 California International Airshow Salinas watch the action in the skies above Salinas.

Harriers and Patriots on hand to thrill crowds

By VICTOR CALDERON
The Salinas Californian

The eyes of Salinas Valley residents will again turn to the skies for the 26th annual California International Airshow in Salinas this Saturday and Sunday.

After a 16-year absence, the Harrier jump jet returns to Salinas. The AV-8B Harrier can both hover and land vertically.

Manufactured by Boeing and used exclusively by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, the Harrier played a pivotal role in Operation Desert Shield during the Persian Gulf War of 1991.



Harry Wardwell

the Airshow.

"These are more jets than we've ever had at one time," Wardwell said.

The Patriots Aerobatic Jet Team, a group of civilian performers, makes its debut at this year's event. The team will thrill audiences, he said, as the jets fly in close formation with streams of red, white and blue smoke trailing behind.

Another first at this year's Airshow is Bud and Ross Granley, a father-and-son team from Canada.

Other military jets at this year's Airshow include the F-15 Eagle, F-16 Falcon and F/A-18 Super Hornet, said Harry Wardwell, executive director of

"They do a dueling Yak act," Wardwell said, referring to the Russian aircraft the Granleys fly called Yaks.

Also, Salinas resident Sean Tucker will perform stunts in his Oracle Challenger biplane and aviation comedian Kent Pietsch will perform high-flying routines, including piloting a plane that falls apart and lands on a moving recreational vehicle.

A number of vintage and military aircraft will be on display on the airport grounds during the air show's two-day run. A NASA exhibit will return to the Airshow concourse.

Also scheduled are the Showcopters, the Air Force Reserve Smoke 'N' Thunder Jet Car, Skydive Monterey Bay, the Heritage Flight and the T-6 Texan II Warbird.

Expected to draw about

50,000 spectators, organizers and volunteers hope the event will raise more than \$250,000 for Salinas-area charities, Wardwell said.

That could mean hitting the \$7 million mark for charity dollars raised by the show over the years. Since 1980, the California International Airshow has generated \$6.8 million for charity, he said.

Wardwell said that of all U.S. air shows, the Salinas event makes the biggest fundraising impact.

"Ours is by far the largest for raising money for charity," he said.

The every-other-year Friday night show, an expensive and volunteer-intensive event, will not be held this year.

Contact Victor Calderón
at vcalderon@thecalifornian.com.



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Shannon Zentner uses her hands to shield her eyes from the sun at the 2003 California International Airshow Salinas.