

Vicky Benzing

There's more to her success than good luck

BY GERI SILVEIRA



"I FELL IN LOVE with the sky at any early age," said Vicky Benzing, aerobatic contest winner, airshow star, air race champion, and pilot of everything from gliders to jets. "I've been passionate about flying my entire life." An accomplished aerobatic competition pilot in both the Intermediate and Advanced categories, Benzing joined the airshow circuit in 2006; she currently amazes fans in either her vintage 1940 450-horsepower Stearman or her high-performance Extra 300S in about 16 airshows a year. "The best thing about airshows is meeting and talking to the kids," she said. "I'm so lucky to be doing this."

Benzing's air racing career began in 2010 at the National Championship Air Races in Reno, Nevada, where she was chosen Rookie of the Year. In 2014, she took home the first place Sport Class Silver and Bronze Class Jet trophies. The next year, Benzing wowed the racing world with her 469-plus-mph qualifying time in an L-139 jet, making her the fastest woman racer in the history of the event. In 2017, she raced an L-39 in the Jet

Class, and Dianna Stanger's twin turbo-charged Lancair Super Legacy *Lucky Too* in the Sport Class. Faced with a blown turbocharger in the last 100 yards of the final lap of the Sport Class Gold race, her luck held: She finished second.

Benzing grew up in a science and aviation family. Her father was an electrical engineer who taught her to work on engines, and her uncle flew airshows. He triggered her interest in aviation with an airplane ride when she was a child. A self-described "nerd," Benzing pursued her passion for math and chemistry, earning a doctorate in physical chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley. In graduate school, Benzing got her pilot certificate, but flying was a hobby, not a profession, while she built her successful career in the tech industry. When Benzing retired, her flying took precedence.

Highly motivated, Benzing maintains a rigorous practice schedule that keeps her in the cockpit about 400 hours a year. The reason? "I like the camaraderie, the people, and the opportunity to be a role model for women and girls."

While Benzing considers herself lucky, her success is clearly the result of hard work. And she shares the glory willingly. "I couldn't do it alone," Benzing said. "If my husband, Jeff, ever stops crewing for me," she laughed, "I'll have to quit." And if we're lucky, that won't be happening any time soon. **AOPA**

LOGBOOK

WHO | Vicky Benzing, airshow performer, air racer, skydiver, technologist

HOURS | 8,000

CERTIFICATES AND RATINGS

| Multiengine ATP; commercial airplane single-engine land and sea, helicopter, glider. Type rating Gulfstream 100; authorized Experimental AV L-29 and AV L-39; surface level aerobatic waiver; formation card.

FAVORITE AIRCRAFT | "My Lancair Legacy, *Lucky Girl*. It's my magic carpet that takes me anywhere I want to go faster than I can imagine."

EXTRA | She flew her Stearman to Oshkosh and back from California—mostly at 500 feet. "It was an amazing open-cockpit experience. Everyone who saw me in that big red biplane would wave as I flew by."