

Pitts, MX2 promise to thrill air show spectators

By Penny Randall

Staff Writer

With more than 25 years of combined flight experience, aerobatic pilots Kendal Simpson in a Pitts Model 12 and Gary Ward in the MX2 will thrill onlookers at "Golden Wings Over Meridian" air show celebrating the 50th anniversary of NAS Meridian and the centennial of Naval Aviation.

Set for March 26-27 at Naval Air Station Meridian, the Navy's elite demonstration team, the Blue Angels will headline the air show with numerous civilian and military acts also set to perform.

From a very young age, Simpson was always fascinated with airplanes. In May 1995 at the age of 19, one of his life-long goals was accomplished when he obtained his private pilot certificate with only 42 hours of flight time. In 2001, Simpson bought his first biplane and started practicing aerobatics. Simpson has accumulated more than 6,800 flight hours in more than 60 different aircraft types. Besides aerobatics he has expe-

rienced all types of aviation including: Flying freight, charter flights, flight instruction, crop dusting, glider towing, corporate, and airline flying. He currently flies some of the most advanced corporate jets in the world both domestically and internationally. His air show two-seater ultimate biplane is 19 feet, 8 inches long, stands 9 feet, 9 inches in height, and weighs 1,525 pounds. It has a wing span of 22 feet.

Ward developed an interest in airplanes as a young teenager, soloed at age 16 in a Piper J-3 Cub and has been passionate about aviation ever since. After high school and a tour with the U.S. Air Force as a jet engine mechanic, Ward graduated from Georgia Institute of Technology with a degree in aerospace engineering. He worked as a design engineer on the Cessna Citation for about a year before "switching hats" to work in a family operated lumber manufacturing business.

Ward began his air show career in 1998 flying a Pitts S2-B. He will dazzle the audience in his MX2 – an aerobatic aircraft. It is

strong, fast and very agile. The entire airframe is constructed of aerospace quality carbon fiber to provide maximum strength and stiffness with minimum weight. The MX2 is powered by a Lycoming engine modified by LYCON to produce more than 350 horsepower.

Ward puts the MX2 through an exciting performance. The action starts on takeoff as Ward pulls steeply up and goes into a spectacular take off maneuver. The entire sequence is jam packed with breathtaking gyrations that range from zero speed hovers to dives in excess of 250 mph. The MX2 is so powerful that at the end of an inverted flat spin, rotation is stopped and the MX2 will fly out, inverted, without the nose ever dropping below the horizon. Ward makes full use of the power and agility of the MX2 to perform many maneuvers that an "airplane just isn't supposed to do!"

The MX2 has a wing span of 24 feet and is 21 feet, 6 inches in length. The plane's cruise speed is 218 mph. Its max speed in dives is 264 mph