

The pilots of MXS and Red Bull Racing

(Editor's note: This is the second in a series profiling the five Red Bull Racers who fly MXS Aircraft.)

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With only two weeks left until the first race of the 2009 Red Bull Air Race World Championship, five of the top pilots in the world are getting set to take to the sky in their MXS aircraft to vie for top prize in one of the most exciting and breathtaking sports in the world.

In 2001, Red Bull invited decorated pilot Peter Besenyei to help create and develop a one of a kind sport that would give its spectators an emotional rush and unbridled excitement like no other. Besenyei worked with the Red Bull Air Race Team for two years while planning, creating and developing the sport and the course. Work on developing the "air gates" began in 2002. The gates are made of highly durable material filled with air designed to disintegrate if tipped by the aircraft.

By 2003, the first course was ready and Besenyei flew through the air gates in a successful exhibition to mark the official beginning of the Red Bull Air Race. The first race was held at the AirPower show in Zeltweg, Austria in June of that same year. Several hundred thousand spectators were immediately hooked on what is fast becoming one of the world's most rapidly growing and popular sports.

The official objective of the race is to navigate an aerial race track featuring the air gates in the fastest possible time incurring as few penalties as possible. Pilots can win points at each race while the one with the most points at the end of the World Championship becomes the Red Bull Air Race World Champion.

Red Bull pilots are among the best in the world capable of withstanding the grueling demands of 12g racing while having the stamina and knowledge to safely perform gravity defying aerobatic skills. Air racing is one of the toughest sports in the world and few pilots have what it takes to compete in the Red Bull global championship. Safety is first and foremost for the five MXS Red Bull pilots and the designers and builders of the MXS Aircraft in Wilkes.

Peter Besenyei is one of the most well known, if not the most well know pilots in aviation today. His love of flying took him to the air as a young boy becoming an aviator at the age of 15. By 28 he was a professional pilot, flight instructor, test pilot and aerobatic competitor. He has logged more than 7000 flight hours.

In 1982 he won every event at the Austrian National Championship and is the most successful Hungarian pilot in World and Continent Championships. He was elected Athlete of the Year in Aerobatics 21 times.

The number of awards, Gold Medals, honors, championships and titles are too numerous to mention for the man dubbed, 'The third best known citizen of Hungary'. Millions watched on 47 national TV channels in five continents as Besenyei was the first to fly under the Budapest Chain Bridge on the Danube only eight meters above the water's surface. Five passes were made under the span with one being flown upside down.

One might think a pilot of such stature and ability would gloat with piousness and prestige. But, Besenyei brings a gentle kindness of gracious manners and a quiet humor of calming laughter to the vibrant and heart stopping sport of air racing.

During his more peaceful hours spent with feet on terra firma, Besenyei explores and devotes his spirit to the many other talents he possesses while following his love and appreciation of life. Music is one of his favorite things as he is an accomplished pianist and enjoys listening to many genres of music. He is also an avid photographer, a fisherman since boyhood, a blue belt in kyokushinkai karate, skier, diver and has successfully made 104 parachute jumps.

The many facets and endearing qualities that have combined to make him one of the world's greatest pilots have indeed made Peter Besenyei one of the most loved and admired men of his country and the world.

Pilot Matt Hall brings a long and vibrant flight history to the sport of air racing. Following in the flight paths of his grandfather who flew in WWII and his father who shared the skies with his young son, Hall made his first solo flight at 15 years old before earning his pilot's license at age 18. Some of the many aircraft he loves to fly are gliders, ultra lights, hang gliders, Mustang P-51D, Vans RV-4, Acrosport II bi-plane, Cherokee 180C, Giles 202 and his most current racer, the MXS. Hall has more than 4000 flight hours.

A decorated fighter pilot, Hall spent 18 years in the Royal Australian Air Force [RAAF] with over 1500 hours flying his Hornet. This Top Gun Combat Fighter Instructor also served three years with the United States Air Force during active war time carrying out combat duties. Hall flew more than 500 hours in his F-15E Strike Eagle and was awarded combat medals by the US and Australia.

Hall also received the Dux of Pilot award, Hornet and Fighter Combat Instructor Award, 1997 Fighter Pilot of the Year Award and Chief of Air Force commendation for his performance as Chief Instructor of 2006 FCI course.

The love of aerobatics is also a passion for Hall as he has shown amazing ability and strength during his transition from combat to competition. By 2005 he had already won the US East Coast Aerobatic Championship Sportsman and NSW State Aerobatic Championships Intermediate. In 2006 he won the Australian Aerobatic Championship Advanced. In 2007 he placed first in Freestyle at the Australian National Aerobatic Championships. Champion Rob Holland allowed him to fly his MX-2 in the US Nationals where he placed tenth overall and fifth in Freestyle. By November he was invited to the Red Bull training camp which he completed in 2008. Hall's talents and abilities were enough for a spot on the Air Race World Championship circuit of which the 2009 Red Bull Season will mark his debut into the most prestigious air sport in the world. Hall proudly becomes the first Australian chosen for the highly regarded Red Bull Air Race Super License.



World renowned pilot and Red Bull Race developer Peter Besenyei returns from a spectacular early morning 'test and tune' flight in his MXS aircraft at the Wilkes County Airport. Record photos by Rebecca Triplett-Johnson



Red Bull pilot Matt Hall prepares for a second round of 'test and tune' flying sessions at the Wilkes County Airport in his MXS aircraft.

While not racing, Hall is developing the 'new freestyle flying' of aerobatics. The already gravity defying science of flight goes to an even more difficult level in using the surfaces of the aircraft as a tool for new maneuvers.

Like Besenyei, the highly efficient Hall has chosen the MXS aircraft to be his Red Bull race plane as he looks forward to years of competitions and a goal of a World Championship within five years.

Hall and his family operate Inverted Downunder in his home of Australia, bringing the exciting world of aerobatics to air shows cooperate events and other public displays.

As Hall lands his MXS after heart stopping 12g maneuvers and 260-plus mph passes, he leaves the speed behind as he walks the thousands of feet of taxi way along the runway. Some of the other pilots take notice of Hall's daily fitness routine, joking to say the Australian has gone walkabout.

All kidding aside, the combat ready, family friendly Hall may be the rookie of the 2009 Red Bull season but enters the race with the highest of respect from his fellow competitors.

Hall has a boyish charm and a champion's heart as he flashes his Aussie smile while excitedly climbing back into the cockpit for another 30 minutes of rapid air time. All eyes will be on Hall as he is introduced to the fans of Red Bull Racing and continues his achievements of mid air excellence.

Families and individuals, both young and old, have been excited and amazed to see the Red Bull pilots as they have spent three weeks in Wilkes preparing for the Red Bull race season that begins on April 17.

Many of those living near the Wilkes County Airport were thrilled as they watched from their yards, the world renowned pilots flying some of the world's best aircraft. Others have made special trips from further out in the county and neighboring counties to get a closer view of their spectacular feats and maybe even an autograph.

For the already loyal Red Bull Air Race fans, the 'test and tune' session at the Wilkes Airport has been a dream come true to watch. For those not familiar with the sport, the once in a lifetime chance to see World Champion pilots have made them devoted fans.

Two neighbors of the airport said they really miss the excitement of the flights that they looked forward to each day.

Another thinks it is wonderful that MX Aircraft chose Wilkes as its home and will be able to offer more jobs to the county as it completes the current expansion.

For more information on Peter Besenyei, Matt Hall and Red Bull Racing go to <http://www.redbullairrace.com/>