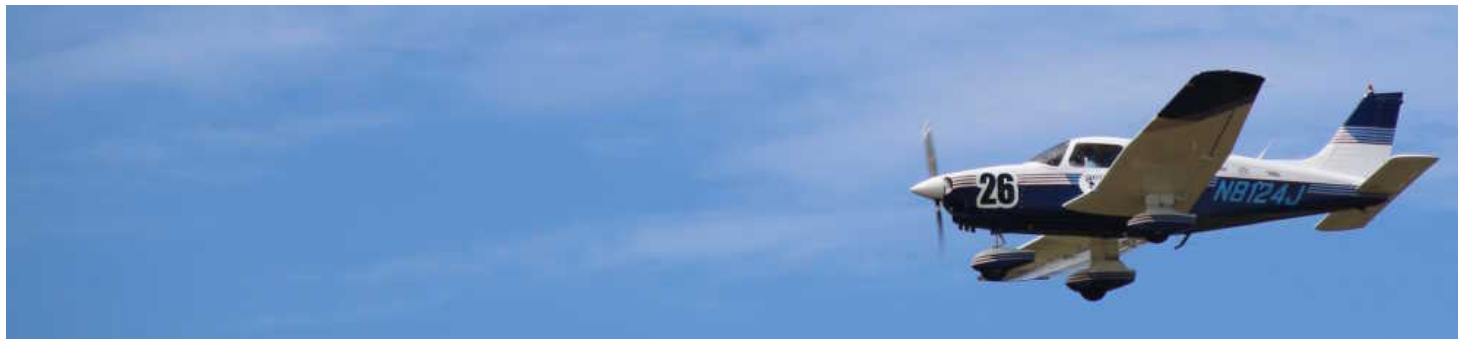


## Air Race Classic makes 1st Spencer visit

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By Randy M. Cauthron, Managing Editor



### **Female cross-country challenge uses local airport as timing site**

Spencer welcomed racers participating in the 41st annual Air Race Classic to the Northwest Iowa Regional Airport beginning Tuesday evening.

An all-women, cross-country aviation competition, ARC aircraft are expected to both passover and some will stop at the local airport through Thursday as part of the 2,648-mile course which for the first time included the Spencer-based aviation center as one of its eight check points.

“I’m not familiar with any other race like this. It is a handicapped race of different aircraft and women pilots. Each plane will have to beat its own handicap giving them an equal chance,” said Gayle Brandt, Leading Edge Aviation Spencer Airport manager.



Volunteers at the Northwest Iowa Regional Airport timing site for the Air Race Classic watch as one of the competing planes approach the fly-by location in Spencer. (Photo by Randy M. Cauthron)

Many of the 52 airplanes began executing high-speed flybys over the timing line on the Spencer airfield as early as Tuesday. Teams will continue to race against the clock, flying over the local airfield today, on their way to the timing destination in Abilene, Kansas.

A total of 111 racers have four days to complete the course which began in Frederick, Maryland, at 8 a.m. Tuesday and will conclude at 5 p.m. Friday in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



The Navigators team, ARC rookie pilot Ailsa Cutting, and her flight partner Paige Attaway, both from West Palm Beach, Florida, used the Spencer timing site as an opportunity to refuel the No. 6 and stretch their legs for a little bit.

“There could be up to 50 planes in one day, or just 20 coming through. The different types of planes will play a factor ...,” explained Theresa White, director of route division for Air Race Classic Inc. “Spencer is about the halfway point.”

Pilots must mark off each check point by doing a fly by at each of the eight stops after flying the timing line. There are some requirements each pilot is required to follow at each timing location.

“When they come in, they will do a flyby of the airport and the trackers in the plane will stop their times. When they take off again, they will do another flyby to start their trackers again,” White

said.

Race participants were required to fly over the marker towers 200 feet above the runway for the length of the airport's runway. They are also required to use their lights, report in at multiple positions as they approach the airport — including 10 miles out, 5 miles out and 1 mile out.

“You get points if you don't do those things,” explained Dr. David Robison, a local volunteer assisting at the Spencer location.

Robison, of Spencer, was among the volunteers from Experimental Aircraft Association No. 999 who assisted at the Northwest Iowa Regional Airport stop. Robison's wife, Shelly, served as the head-timer for the Spencer fly by and organized the volunteer workforce. Robison said 17 volunteers along with students from the Iowa Lakes Community College Aviation program and Leading Edge Aviation site staff worked to fulfill on-ground race responsibilities, welcome and serve those who stopped for fuel and rest, and provide refreshments.

Robison noted weather conditions in Spencer morning play a factor in the competition. “Part of the strategy of the race is predicting the weather, predicting the winds.”



Workers at the timing check point in Spencer welcome an ARC racer who decided to use the northwest Iowa fly-by site as a quick stop after lunch Wednesday.

How long it will take each team to finish the race depends on the weather, the pilot's strategy and the speed of the airplane. The fastest planes may complete the course in two days, while the slowest aircraft may take all four days. But because the ARC is a handicap race, teams are racing against their own best time, not against one another. This allows slower planes to compete against faster aircraft on an equal basis. When each team reaches Santa Fe, a group of scorers will calculate the times and determine the winners.

The eight stops in the race include Coshocton, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Decorah; Bemidji, Minnesota; Spencer; Abilene, Kansas; Ardmore, Oklahoma; and Plainview, Texas.

Four pilots made it all the way to Spencer on day one and left just ahead of severe weather which delivered heavy rains, lightening and thunder to the region early Wednesday morning. The next pilots began arriving in Spencer shortly after the storms began moving out of the area, having spent the night in the previous check-point stop in Bemidji, Minnesota.

Lin Caywood, a seven-year ARC pilot, who lives in Frederick — the race’s starting point — flies the “Freakin Awesome” No. 12. During a quick pit stop in Spencer for refueling and a quick equipment check before noon Wednesday, called day one “hot and bumpy” and said she was experiencing “lots of headwinds” on day two but still insisted, “We’re having a grand time.”

“I fly for fun,” she said, traveling with flight partner Janet Davidson, a resident of Frederick and native of Scotland. “These two weeks when we get together every summer I call fly camp. It’s a friendly competition and we can test our skills, but there are about half of us who have been doing it every year and we get this chance to see each other.”

ARC rookie Ailsa Cutting also used the Spencer check point as an opportunity to fill up on fuel. She and flight partner Paige Attaway, both of West Palm Beach, took the opportunity to stretch their legs for a little bit.

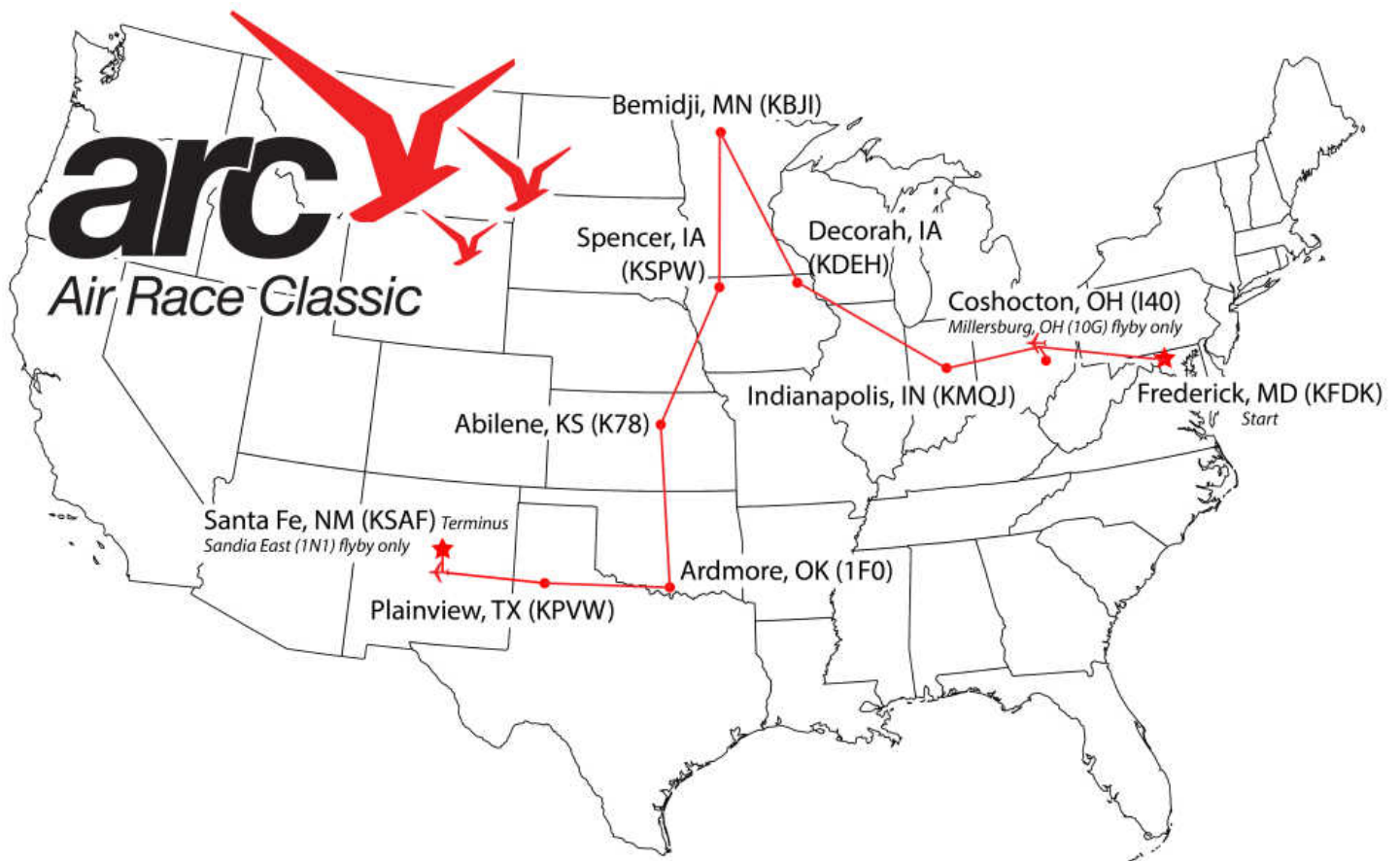
No. 6 “The Navigators” were in the air for close to 12 hours on day one before taking off again Wednesday morning from Bemidji.

“So far it’s been great,” Cutting said of her first cross country challenge. “I fly solo a lot. It’s nice having someone else in the cockpit.”

“We’re actually about half the way through.” she added after over a day of air travel. “I’m surprised at how competitive some racers are. Some are flying low to the towers and taking risks.”

Spencer was chosen as a stop along the course for having an airport that meets the race criteria and an application that was submitted by Brandt.

“I made my request for Spencer to be a stop a while back. It has been about a two-year process,” Brandt explained.



In addition, Spencer was recommended by Air Race Classic board of director's member Minnetta Gardinier, of Iowa City.

Cutting said she enjoys the opportunity to cross the country.

"It's the first chance to see a lot of the country I would not see otherwise," the Florida resident said. "And we get to meet a lot of people."

"It makes us appreciate the small airports that host us," Caywood said. "... It's great for these towns to get to showcase what they have. A lot of these airports in the Midwest are hidden gems. And we remember them when we fly."

Several aviation celebrities are among this year's first-time racers: U.S. national aerobatics champion Debby Rihn-Harvey, and Ariel Tweto, star of the Discovery channel show "Flying Wild Alaska."

The Air Race Classic traces its roots to the 1929 Women's Air Derby, in which Amelia Earhart and 19 other daring female pilots raced from Santa Monica, California, to Cleveland, Ohio. That contest, aka the Powder Puff Derby, marked the beginning of women's air racing in the United States. Today, the ARC is the epicenter of women's air racing, the ultimate test of aeronautical ability and decision-making for female pilots of all ages and from all walks of life.

Competitors this year range from college students to a veteran racer in her 80s. Some are flying the ARC for the first time, while others have dozens of races in their logbooks. Each race plane

carries a team of two or three women: pilot, copilot and an optional teammate. Of the 52 teams in this year's race, 16 are representing colleges or universities.

For some racers, the ARC is a family affair. Two teams consist of mothers and daughters racing together. One of the collegiate team pilots, who used to race with her grandmother and aunt, will be competing against them this year for the first time.

White encouraged those who are interested in following the race to go to the real-time tracking map at [airraceclassic.org](http://airraceclassic.org).