



Deborah Dreyfuss

Fast planes and fast cars

BY JULIE SUMMERS WALKER

AS YOU READ THIS, Debi Dreyfuss and her “DC3” team are scheduled to be racing from Prescott, Arizona, to Daytona Beach, Florida, in the fortieth annual Women’s Air Race Classic, held June 21 through 24. This will be her team’s seventh time competing, and the 65-year-old grandmother who loves “fast planes and fast cars” hopes for a showing like in 2011, when they came in sixth. Even if they place twenty-fourth, as they did in 2010, Dreyfuss will be happy. She’s got the fastest Cessna 182 in the history of the air race—and, she says, she’s “the luckiest woman on Earth.”

This wasn’t always the case. A divorced mother of two, she had dreamed of flying since she was 6, when her uncle took her up in his Cessna 172. When she told her mother she wanted to learn to fly, she said, “No! Absolutely not,” says Dreyfuss, who says her mother didn’t believe girls should do things such as flying aircraft. “I was the son my father always wanted,” she says.

She kept her desire to fly hidden from her first husband, whom she married while in college. One year he received a work bonus and offered to share it with her, she said. When she replied she’d use the money for flying lessons, he, too, said absolutely not.

Once on her own and making her own money—she ran an architectural sign company near Washington, D.C., for

20 years—Dreyfuss trained in a 1946 Piper Cub at Davis Airport in Laytonsville, Maryland. She bought a Cessna 150 before she’d earned her certificate.

Dreyfuss believes in encouraging others to fly. Each year she funds the Debi Dreyfuss Dare to be Different awards for pilots in local chapters of The Ninety-Nines. She also is a contributor to the AOPA Foundation. “I’ve lost a few pilot friends to air accidents and have advocated aviation safety to prevent additional tragedies,” she says. “The more training and safety awareness, the better chance we pilots have for experiencing the joys of flight unscathed. Each one of us is an aviation ambassador, and the safer we are, the better image we have for general aviation.”

AOPA

LOGBOOK

WHO | Debi Dreyfuss, Air Race Classic competitor

HOURS | More than 2,100

RATINGS | ASEL, ASES, instrument, commercial, CFI, ATP

AIRCRAFT | 1977 Cessna 150 converted taildragger, 2005 Cessna 182, and 2014 Piper PA-46 Mirage

EXTRA | “I’m teaching my 14-year-old grandson to fly. I’ve been taking him up with me since he was 18 months old. He’s pretty good with the 182 but I want him to master the taildragger. I marvel that he can fly a plane but he can’t drive a car yet.”



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