

# Okie Dust Devils to blow through town

## Annual aerobatic contest begins Friday

**Julie Harding**

City Editor

The skies over Weatherford have more than thunderstorms and summer songbirds to catch the attention of those gazing upward this week, as some of the world's greatest aerobatic pilots flock to the Thomas P. Stafford Airport to compete in the 10th annual Okie Dust Devil aerobatic contest.

"Our aerobatic contest is considered one of the best around, with the exception of the national competition," Airport Manager John Creswell said. "We're expecting around 25 to 30 aircraft and about that many pilots this weekend."

Creswell coordinates the annual event, with help from staff and volunteers who register pilots, assist the judges and help wherever needed to continue to make the event a yearly success.

The Okie Dust Devil is a popular event among

Weatherford residents who gather over the weekend to watch seasoned aerobatic pilots do loops and dives and spins to compete in four different categories of aerobatic flying.

"The four categories include Basic, Sportsman, Advanced and Unlimited," President of the local chapter of the International Aerobatics Club (and pilot) Mark Berrong explained. "We have a certain format that we fly, and that is how they judge the pilots."

Berrong said the Basic and Sportsman flyers are given a format prior to the competition, and pilots are able to practice their routine in advance.

Things get a little more interesting in the top categories, however. Berrong said pilots in those categories have two formats - "known and

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and the unknown format is given the night before the competition.

"They don't get a chance to practice it," Berrong explained. "So they have to go through the format in their head before they go up."

The "known" format is choreographed by the pilot and given to the judge prior to the competition. Therefore, pilots in the Unlimited category will have different stunts and routines than other pilots in their class.

Although the Okie Dust Devil is a competition and not an air show, the public is invited to observe the event.

"Some of these pilots are the best pilots you'll ever find," Berrong said. "A lot of them are actually commercial pilots. They come from all over the United States to compete here."

Pilots such as Vicky Cruse, Norm DeWitt, Dan Clark and Debbie Rihn-Harvey (international aerobatics champion inducted into the International Aerobatic Hall of Fame) will compete above the Stafford airfield, Berrong said.

"They (the pilots) like coming to Weatherford, because the people here are so friendly," Berrong said. "They seem to be tolerant of the noise level and they seem to enjoy watching the competition."

The event begins Friday, and wraps up with an awards ceremony and dinner Saturday evening.

"We'll get underway Friday about 8 a.m.," Creswell said. "The FFA will have a concession here for the public, and we welcome anyone who wants to come watch the competition."

