

THEM ALABAMA BOYS

By Jeff Parnau

Greg Koontz is about as Southern as a man can be. He's big, loud, funny, and proud to be an Alabama boy. Proud enough to have renamed his comedy act after his favorite state. And so, 2006 saw the debut of the Alabama Boys, complete with brand-new diesel truck with an airport on top, brand new Decathlon, and crew of two or three Southern boys to assist in the act.

Greg starts the comedy act by storming up the ladder to the airshow announcer's platform, and presenting a flight certificate that he bought in the 1980's. He demands to take a flight lesson, today. After a suitable argument with the announcer, he departs, but says he'll be back.

After a few more airshow acts, he returns to the announcer, stating that he's just verified with the sheriff that his certificate is indeed valid, and he wants to fly, right now. The announcer works it out with the airboss, and Greg — well, let's make that Clem Cleaver — is told to meet his pilot at the little yellow airplane in front of the crowd.

By now, pickup truck driver Bob has deposited the very Southern Tom and his easy chair in front of the crowd. A massive chain and ball keep Rat Dog near Tom and his shotgun. Yep. Shotgun.

Clem approaches the Cub, picks up its tail, rocks its wings, and eventually gets in. The pilot asks him to hold the brakes

while he props the airplane. And then, like the legendary "Flying Farmer," Charlie Kulp, Clem hits the throttle, the pilot chases him, and off he goes in a wild "first solo." Clem gets the Cub down into gullies, just over the treetops, sideways, and into low and slow loops. Meanwhile, the announcer is trying to figure out a way to get him down. He finally asks old Tom to fire a warning shot to get Clem's attention. Tom picks up his gun, fires, and a tire falls from the Cub.

Now the announcer comes up with another idea. Why not send a truck down the runway, so Clem can continue his



Clem plants the Cub atop The Alabama Boys' truck.



Jim Proxberger

attempts to land on only one wheel, right on top of the truck. Bob pulls onto the runway and accelerates to about 45 mph. Clem makes an initial attempt to connect with the truck, bounces off, and wildly flies away. Bob turns around, drives back, and tries again. This time, Clem successfully plants the Cub on the platform atop the truck. The crowd goes wild and the announcer finally admits that it was, in fact, all an act. (Like we didn't know!)

What's the act really like? For the first time this year, the FAA is classifying photographers as qualified to be "in the box," meaning that they can get closer than 500 feet to an aerobatic act. Furthermore, the truck-top landing involves no aerobatics. So I asked for, and got permission, to ride in the bed of the truck, beneath the platform. On Greg's first "attempt," I was stunned at how firmly he plants the Cub on the truck. The whole truck shook. So did I.


Greg never succeeds at his first try. It's part of the act. Depending on the amount of time he has, he may make a second failed attempt. If he misses on the third try, it ain't gonna happen — because under the wrong wind conditions, it's simply too difficult.

You might think that there would be a lot of chatter among Tom, Bob, and Greg as the act goes on. Oddly enough, there is no talk at all. Tom "shoots" the tire off at a certain part of the act. (Unless he forgets.) Bob hits the runway after the gunshot (or after the gun should have been shot). Greg makes one failed attempt, and probably lands on the second attempt, and never after the third attempt. If the landing is successful, there's a quick parade in front of the crowd, Cub on top of the truck, and a final pass down the runway so the Cub can be ridden to a conventional landing.

As a variation in the act, Greg's son James gets into character and narrates along with the announcer, screamin' and hollerin' and finally suggesting that Clem can put anything in a truck, so why not an airplane?

Koontz typically brings the Cub, truck, and his new Super Decathlon to an airshow. Although most pilots consider the 180hp trainer a bit docile by today's airshow standards, Greg surprises more than a few fellow performers with his outside loop and lomcevak (commonly called a tumble) and finishes with an inverted ribbon cut.

When he's not doing airshows, Greg doesn't revert to a conventional day job as do many performers. Rather, he runs a unique bed-and-breakfast flight school on his private airstrip in Ashville, Alabama. If you book a few days, you can eat, sleep and breathe aerobatics with a basic or advanced course, or simply get comfortable with unusual attitude recoveries such as inverted, upright, or flat spins.

Visit his website at <http://www.gkairshows.com> 



Jim Fronchewer



Jeff Parratt



Jeff Parratt

Top: Greg actually flies the Decathlon under the ribbon before he cuts it.

Middle: My view from the bed of Greg's truck as the Cub comes in for a landing

Bottom: One of the more unique perspectives of the truck-top landing

Clem careens wildly down the runway



Jeff Parratt