

# Wiley Post Spirit Award Recipient



*Photo of Andy Keech taken by David Fitzgerald and Associates of OKC*

Bob Kemper, executive director of the Curtiss-Wright Wiley Post Hangar, Inc., at Oklahoma City, announced the creation of the Wiley Post Commission in 2004. "The purpose of the commission is to establish an annual award which gives national and international recognition to an individual in General Aviation, who best exemplifies the engineering and innovative pioneering of Wiley Post. In particular, to someone who hasn't the financial support of either the government, or of large corporate backing," Bob Kemper said.

"Too often achievements in General Aviation or Sport Aviation are not recognized because they are an individual's effort and these pilots and builders don't have the media apparatus to make their endeavors known," Kemper added.

The recipient of the 2004 "Wiley Post Spirit Award" was Andy

Keech. An awards banquet was held at the Wiley Post Airport in Oklahoma City, in January.

**For many years**, Andy Keech has been interested in aircraft. By the age of seven, he was building balsa, rubber-band-propelled modeled aircraft and reading all the books a young person could find on flying.

When he was eight, he had his first flight in a barnstorming itinerant air-

craft, and from then on he had a passionate interest in aviation. He clipped articles and pictures from newspapers and magazines to be pasted into scrap books, and he was able to recognize any aircraft that existed at that time.

At seventeen, he earned his first full-time employment check, part of which was invested in his first flying lesson. He soloed later that year, but unfortu-

nately moved to a town that had no flying club. However, that did not hold him back. He segued into sport parachuting at 19, and developed a passion for the sport which lasted for the next 20 years.

During that time he became one of Australia's pioneer skydivers. He was, with his jump partner, the first Australian to successfully make contact in freefall (relative work). He became a senior as well as chief instructor, na-

tional champion parachutist and held the first two expert parachutist licenses issued to an Australian (E1 and F1). He competed at a world competition in Germany and was the top scorer on his team.

Andy came to the US around this time and continued skydiving, but also resumed flying lessons. He became one of the world's top free fall photographers, and produced three books on skydiving. He had assignments with Sports Illustrated, TIME magazine, the London Times and other publications, which took him to Africa, Europe and the Pacific as well as all over the United States.

Andy built and jumped his own parachute, and was the first freefall photographer to transition on to the modern, high performance ram air parachutes. He was one of a handful of skydivers to dive off El Capitan in the Yosemite Valley. His El Cap number is 83 (83rd person to free fall down that cliff face). He organized the visit to, and jumped, in China as still photographer on the US Skydiving team in 1980.

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