

Andy Keech - First Recipient of the New Spirit of Wiley Post Award

The Curtiss-Wright Wiley Post Hangar, Inc. of Oklahoma City recently formed the Wiley Post Commission. The new Wiley Post Commission has created a new award in honor of Wiley Post, the famed Oklahoma aviator. This award is called the "Wiley Post Spirit Award."

Bob Kemper, the executive director of the Curtiss-Wright Wiley Post Hangar, Inc., said, "The purpose of this commission is to establish an annual award that brings national and international recognition to an individual in general aviation who best exemplifies the engineering and innovative pioneer spirit of Wiley Post. In particular, we want to award the Wiley Post Spirit Award to someone who hasn't the financial support of either the government or of a large corporate backer." Kemper continues, "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."

The Wiley Post Commission selection committee consists of long time aviation



With "Woodstock" in the background, Andy Keech stands proudly with the Wiley Post Spirit Award

professionals, aircraft builders and pilots, plus a former astronaut. Kemper explains, "One of our commission members was instrumental in the creation of the 'Jim Thorpe Award,' one of the most prestigious awards in collegiate football. We will build the Wiley Post Spirit Award into an equally prestigious award."

The recipient of the 2004 Wiley Post Spirit Award was

announced during the first annual Wiley Post Spirit Award Banquet on January 28th. Mr. Andy Keech was honored as the award recipient during the "black tie" ceremony and was further recognized by Mr. Victor Bird, Chairman of the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission. The following story is an example of how an individual's fortitude and drive keeps the true spirit of general aviation alive.

As far back as he can remember as a young boy in Australia, Andy has been interested in aircraft. By the age of seven, he was building balsa, rubber-band-propelled model aircraft and reading all the books a young person could find about flying.

When he was eight, he had his first flight in a barnstorming itinerant aircraft, and from then on he had a passionate interest in aviation. He clipped articles and pictures from newspapers and magazines to be pasted into

scrapbooks, and he was able to recognize any aircraft that existed at that time.

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. He became a senior as well as chief instructor, national champion parachutist and held the first two expert parachutist licenses issued to an Australian. He competed at a world competition in Germany and was the top scorer on his team.

Andy came to the U.S. 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 over to the modern, high performance ram air parachutes. He was one of the small hand-full of

continued on p. 2.



Woodstock has a "special" form of beauty. It's called function!



Victor Bird, OAC Chairman congratulates Andy Keech

Andy Keech

continued from p. 1.



Andy Keech tells his story

skydivers to dive off El Capitan in the Yosemite Valley. His El Cap number is 83 (83rd person to freefall down that cliff face). He organized the visit to, and jumped, in China as a still photographer on the U.S. Skydiving team in 1980. His work hung in the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum in Washington DC, and he was honored with the Master of Sport award by the Australian Parachute Association in recognition of his international achievements.

While accomplishing the above, he also earned the following certificates and ratings: senior parachute rigger, commercial, single engine, multi-engine, instrument, rotorcraft, helicopter and gyroplane.

He built and flew an ultralight, and repaired a wrecked light aircraft, which became his private plane. He also flew jump aircraft, gliders, tow planes, helicopters and autogyros.

However, it was the world of autogyros that began to fascinate him and eventually Andy decided to build a new design gyroplane (Little Wing Autogyro). He worked with Ron Herron, an airframe and powerplant mechanic, instructor, and designer to build a light, high-performance, safe aircraft, which he called 'Woodstock'. The collaboration took five-years.

In October 2003, Andy flew Woodstock across the U.S. and back, resetting three trans-continental speed records. Then, in February 2004 he set a new world distance record of 617 miles, and in May, a new altitude (26,408feet) and time-to-climb world records. The LW-5 (Woodstock) is unique. It is the only aircraft to ever hold records in all parameters of performance...speed, distance, climb and altitude. Andy now looks forward to setting further world records.

The story of Andy Keech is new to us in Oklahoma but now that he has been recognized as carrying on the mantel of our own Wiley Post, you can be sure the *Aviator* will keep you up to date about Andy. Be assured, Andy has much more to offer.