

First Indian Pilot Dives Into the U.S. Nationals Aerobatic Box

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The aviation bug bit me when, as a little kid, I saw the swept-wing Tornado¹ scream down the runway on one of the most elegant takeoffs ever. My decision was made, and the ship set sail toward the ultimate destination — becoming a pilot! The journey has been a long, arduous one, and many would agree that it is never-ending. With ups and downs at every corner, it is challenging to say the least, and that is the beauty of it.

My journey to becoming a pilot began when I moved to Canada from India for my flight training at Harv's Air in the summer of 2017. After completing my

flight lessons in the morning, I would watch Luke Penner, Advanced competitor, tear up the lovely evening sky in the Pitts S-2B. Hearing those propellers shred every molecule of air ahead and watching Luke's aerobatic routine made me want to try this kind of flying. Aerobatics was still like a sacred kingdom to me. To pass through the hallowed gates seemed to require skills that didn't seem within the reach of a private pilot. As almost like following a timetable, I made it a point to watch those aerobatic flights after my lessons.

Little did I know of what was to come.

I continued with my training and finished my commercial license in January 2018. Thereafter, I started working toward my instructor rating, which would allow me to conduct lessons for ab initio students



Atamvir started his flight training at the family-owned Harv's Air in the summer of 2017 in Steinbach in the Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada area.

(or in American terms, English-as-a-second-language students). On one cold March morning, as I pulled into the parking lot at Harv's Air, I saw a trailer with an Extra 300 being delivered and instantly knew that I had to fly this beast of an airplane. It was just a matter of when.

In 2019, aerobatics took a back seat as I directed my attention to instructing, focusing on multiengine and instrument ratings. My goal was to dive into aerobatics (pun intended) in 2020, but as luck would have it, the world came to a grinding halt. During this time, I read the book *Basic Aerobatics* by Geza Szurovy and Mike Goulian, and it provided a great insight into the world of precision aerobatics. These were not cavalier stuntmen performing dangerous acts in the sky; these were musicians who had rehearsed every note down to perfection before they ever performed.

Fast-forward to 2021, and I flew my first aerobatic contest in the Primary category in a Citabria 7ECA. The idea behind flying the Citabria was to learn the art and science of a loop, roll, and spin in an

aircraft that wasn't forgiving if all four controls were not managed correctly. I went on to place first in that contest and met some wonderful people in the aerobatic community. I knew I had to keep

going because I loved this kind of flying.

As I spent more time around IAC members and reading through the history of aerobatics, a big realization dawned upon me — India has had almost little to no representation in the sport. In my opinion, this reality was mind-boggling, given

India is one of the youngest and most talented populations in

the world. My goal was set: to be the first Indian to fly at the U.S. National Aerobatic Championships.

The year 2021 was when I started flying aerobatics, but I did not practice it initially beyond the one contest I attended. My objective in 2022 was to fly at the Canadian and U.S. Nationals, as these contests promised immense talent to compete against, while meeting some absolutely incredible people in the community.

In the summer of 2022, my first flight in the Extra 300L happened. Nothing beats the excitement and anxiousness of a first flight, especially that of a high-performance tailwheel monoplane! We had briefed the first flight countless times, and I had mentally flown it from start to finish, over and over. I took a few deep breaths to overcome the sheer emotion of being strapped inside this beast we were about to unleash. Something that stood out at the outset was the roll rate. The aircraft rolled like no other I had ever flown. With feather-like inputs required to keep the aircraft going where I needed it to go, the Extra felt like gliding on the surf.





After the first aerobatic contest, I went back to being a “1g” human being for all of my flying. Eventually the day came when I took a second round of training in the Extra with Luke. This time, flying basic figures in the Extra tumbled my internal gyros pretty hard and made me sick to my core. The third flight was no different. When the fourth flight ended with the same fate, I almost felt like it was not meant to be. Luke and I decided we were not going to give up and approached the problem differently. Every flight moving forward, we stuck to a fairly basic routine and added a few minutes of extra aerobatic flying with each flight. The fifth flight lasted 15 minutes, and the sixth went on for about 18 minutes. And so forth, ever so slowly, I felt my body had harmonized itself with the aircraft, and it reached a point where about 25 minutes of aerobatics seemed to be tolerable. From there on, it was just a matter of making time for practice and trying to finesse the finer points in the sequence. Because of how busy both Luke’s, and my schedules were, we decided it would be wise not to focus on soloing the Extra and have Luke fly as a safety pilot in the next aerobatic contest I would fly.

This development led me to my home contest, the Central Canada Aerobatic Championships in Steinbach, Manitoba. Having flown here the previous year and knowing the box and airspace made the jump from Primary to Sportsman fairly straightforward. The idea was to learn to fly the Extra 300 in the box in front of some of the best judges in the business and work on presentation. We planned this contest to be a work-up to the Canadian Nationals.

The Canadian Nationals at Rocky Mountain House (Rocky) came next. I drove to Rocky and was met by Luke who flew the Extra to the contest; I almost instantly got into the training mode. We flew three flights with very particular goals. The first was to familiarize with the airspace, the high-density altitudes at Rocky, and box geometry. The second flight was to fly a clean Sportsman sequence and concentrate on a few figures that we decided needed work. The third and final flight was flown like a full-dress rehearsal of the competition flight, and I was afforded some great critique from the Advanced category pilots on the ground. In the Sportsman category, I flew against the Canadian Nationals champion Phillip Dewsnap from the previous year, and what a close contest it was! All said and done, when the dust settled, we were sharing the podium with him leading by 0.18 percent. Nail-biting for sure!

Something else interesting transpired at Rocky. I had the good fortune of meeting Aaron McCartan, U.S. Advanced team member. From the get-go, I realized this pilot was someone who had dedicated his entire life to the sport, and small but important inputs from him made me improve my flying almost instantly. It also highlighted how giving the aerobatic community is. As the sun went down at the Canadian Nationals, I saw how fierce the competition could be at the national level.

One challenge I had not given enough credit to was how tough it was to balance and manage serious aerobatics alongside a full-time day job. To pay my bills, I worked as a King Air captain, flying medevacs in the Canadian Arctic. Having crisscrossed the country coast-to-coast and flown patients from as far north as Resolute Bay (74 degrees north), it definitely took some work to practice aerobatics

Atamvir dives into the box at the 2022 U.S. National Aerobatic Championships.



Atamvir trained with Canadian Advanced Team Captain Luke Penner in the Extra 300L.

before contests, get to the venues, and most importantly, be in the right headspace before a training or competition flight.

Prior to flying to the U.S. Nationals, Luke and I decided to do a training camp with Aaron in Algona, Iowa. We got to Algona and flew some goal-oriented practice flights to try and fix one figure at a time. From sunrise to sunset, we spent time briefing, flying, and debriefing, then repeating it over at least once. The evenings were spent exploring what this quaint little town had to offer. At the end of three days, it felt as though my aerobatic flying had received a huge revamp and definitely made me better prepared for the U.S. Nationals.

Without a doubt, the mecca of aerobatics, the U.S. Nationals did not disappoint. Our arrival in Salina, Kansas, was a culmination of a dream that took five years to materialize. Seeing the amount of talent on display in Salina and being surrounded by some of the greatest names in the sport made my Salina experience a total success.

After our first flight in the box at Salina, I knew I had done it. It took a lot of work to get here, but it had happened: I had become the first Indian pilot to dive into the box at the U.S. Nationals in the Sportsman category. Each flight at the U.S. Nationals was epic, and it felt amazing to be competing with some of the best names in the sport.

It has been a rewarding journey so far, and I am certain it will continue to be amazing. It feels great to be representing my country in Canada and the United States, and I look forward to continuing. Aerobatics is pure joy and increases command on all axes of flight!

IAC†

Atamvir Singh Multani has 3,200 hours of total flight time. He has flown a King Air 200, an Extra 300L, and a Beechcraft Travel Air. Currently, he is transitioning between jobs and undergoing type training for the Boeing 737. His goal in aerobatics is to represent India at the World Aerobatic Championships at some point.

†Panavia Tornado is a family of twin-engine, variable-sweep wing multirole combat aircraft, jointly developed and manufactured by Italy, the United Kingdom, and West Germany.



Atamvir feels pure joy as he realizes his dream to be the first pilot from India to fly in the Sportsman category at the U.S. Nationals.



Getting some coaching from Aaron McCartan, U.S. Advanced Team member.