

vicky benzing biography

Born and raised in California, Vicky Benzing is an accomplished pilot, skydiver, aerobatic performer, and air racer. With over 10,000 hours of flight time and over 1300 parachute jumps, Vicky has a passion for everything airborne. Her flying career has spanned over forty years and she currently holds an Airline Transport Pilot rating as well as a commercial rating in helicopters, seaplanes, and gliders and has flown over 50 different types of aircraft.

Vicky still remembers her first flight in her uncle's airplane when she was just a small child. Inspired by that flight at a very young age, Vicky learned to fly in a family friend's antique Taylorcraft in her hometown of Watsonville, on the California coast. She was thrilled by the spins, loops, and rolls that her ex-military instructor taught her and subsequently took aerobatic instruction from legendary pilot Amelia Reid.

Vicky's aerobatic flying took a brief back seat while she earned her PhD in Chemistry from UC Berkeley and began working in the Silicon Valley high tech industry. But her passion for spins, loops, and rolls soon returned when she took an aerobatic flight with air show legend, Wayne Handley.

In 2005, Vicky began her aerobatic training in earnest. She began competing in aerobatic contests throughout the US, working her way up through the many categories. In between contests, Vicky also began performing in local air shows. Today Vicky holds a surface level aerobatic waiver and has flown hundreds of air show performances at venues across the United States, including as an invited performer at the world's greatest airshow, EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh, WI.

In addition to aerobatics, Vicky got the racing bug when a friend invited her to "come play in my sandbox" at the National Championship Air Races in Reno, NV. In her first year of racing, Vicky was chosen as "Rookie of the Year" after having won her first race ever, and in 2015 Vicky became the "Fastest Woman Racer" ever in the history of the Reno Air Races when she qualified an Aero Vodochody jet on the race course at 469.831 mph. In September of 2023, Vicky flew her iconic P-51D, "Plum Crazy", to a 4th place finish among the Gold racers in the Unlimited Class. She is only the second woman ever to race in the Unlimited Class in the 59-year history of the Reno Air Races and the only woman to have raced in three classes- Sport, Jet, and Unlimited.

Vicky is a member of the Screen Actor's Guild and has had the opportunity to fly in a number of film, television, and other media projects. Vicky can be seen flying her beautiful Boeing Stearman in the documentary film "Mercury 13" which is currently airing on Netflix. Other film and television projects include episodes of "Ice Pilot," "NCIS LA," "Walker Texas Ranger," and extensive stunt work in her Stearman for the short film "Niner Echo Foxtrot."

Vicky is sponsored by [California Aeronautical University](#), an aeronautical training center offering aviation-related degree programs to prepare students for exciting careers in aviation. The University's campus is a purpose-built flight training facility located at the Bakersfield International Airport. The on-airport campus hosts ideal flying conditions year-round, student housing, and FAA Part 141 approved training. Visit the California Aeronautical University website at [CALAERO.EDU](#) to tour the campus and learn more about their aviation-related degree programs.

Vicky's other sponsors include: APECS Aerospace Corporation, Concorde Batteries, Tempest, Gleim Aviation, Oregon Aero, Lift Aviation, Best Tugs, and Method 7 Performance Optics.

You can learn more about Vicky by visiting her website at www.vickybenzing.com

PLUM CRAZY

Built in 1944 shortly before the end of WWII, this beautiful P-51 Mustang fighter never left the US before the end of the war. It was transferred as part of a block of surplus fighters to Sea Island (Vancouver) Canada in 1950 where it served in the RCAF until 1958 when it was sold out of the Crown Assets Disposal Corporation.

Al Paulson (the founder of Gulfstream) purchased the airplane in 1964 for his friend Clay Lacy to race in the inaugural Reno Air Races. Around that time, Al was starting an airline with service to Hawaii. He ordered 50 gallons of a custom purple paint to paint a stripe on the side of the airliners. He was accidentally shipped 1500 gallons of this custom purple paint, and so all of the toolboxes, tugs and ladders in his hangar, along with the new P-51 Mustang, were painted in the purple color.

Clay campaigned the purple Mustang at the National Championship Air Races in Reno, NV from 1964 to 1972, winning the National Championship in 1970.

Clay purchased the airplane in 1967 from Al and competed in many air races across the United States and attended many airshows with it. The purple color made the airplane instantly recognizable, and because of this, Fred Smith, the founder of FedEx, decided to incorporate the color purple into the logo for FedEx. If you get a chance to look at the airplane closely, you will see many of the air races that it competed in listed on the right gear leg door.

The great Bob Hoover once flew this airplane in an airshow when his own Mustang was inoperative, and the airplane has carried a number of other famous people as passengers. This famous Mustang has also starred in an episode of Magnum PI, "Two Birds of a Feather," and is one of three vintage air racers featured in the Revell model "Air Racers!"

After having owned the airplane for 55 years, Clay sold his beloved Mustang to his friend Vicky Benzing in 2019. Vicky flew it to Reno that same year to be exhibited as a static display. After the air races, she flew it down to Chino, CA for restoration under the careful guidance of Steve Hinton Jr and his team at Fighter Rebuilders. Repainted in its original purple racing livery and with a freshly overhauled engine, Vicky campaigned it to a 4th-place finish in the Unlimited Class at the final National Championship Air Race in Reno, NV in September 2023.

A favorite among youngsters in the early years when Clay was flying the airplane, Vicky is thrilled to be once again sharing this iconic purple air racer with airshow fans across the country.

Air Show Talking Points - 2026

About California Aeronautical University (CAU)

- California Aeronautical University is training the next generation of pilots.
- The CAU main campus is an impressive purpose-built flight training in Kern County. They also have Flight Centers in Ventura and San Diego Counties, and a campus in Phoenix.
- CAU students are on the faster track to pilot careers. Designed for optimal efficiency, the pilot bachelor's degree program allows students to start flying in their first term and earn a degree while building flight hours, all within about 3 years.
- CAU students earn 6 certificates and ratings, and train on CAU's own fleet of aircraft.
- CAU is a partner university to United Airlines and several regional airlines, which offers CAU students direct, streamlined routes to work for the airlines.
- The University offers tuition reductions to eligible recent high school graduates, including a \$10,000 reduction for their bachelor's degree in aeronautics.
- Check out the CAU website at calaero.edu (cal-aero dot e-d-u) to learn more.

CAU and Vicky Benzing

- California Aeronautical University has teamed up with aerobatic pilot Vicky Benzing flying in today's show to inspire youth about the excitement of aviation.
- Sharing a mutual love of aviation, their partnership helps to introduce young people to careers as professional pilots and other rewarding aviation-related professions.

CAU's Booth

- For those seeking structure, financial assistance, airline partnerships, newer aircraft, and the security of obtaining a degree, CAU is here to answer your questions and share what they can do for you.
- Stop by and say hi to CAU at their booth this weekend.