

VIRTUAL

Thunderbirds

In The Loop

Spring 2011



2011 Training Season

At long last, we have kicked off our 2011 training season in earnest. The Virtual Thunderbirds (VTB) took a break from flying to focus on real life matters that touched everyone on the team in different ways over the past year. During this lengthy hiatus, the overwhelming feeling of wanting to fly continued pushing the team to get back up in the air. With the passion and desire our team has to fly for you once again, what has seemed a monumental task has finally begun.



During the time when flying took a back seat, there was still a great deal of work being done behind the scenes. The team spent 2010 working closely with Thrustmaster, beta testing the HOTAS Warthog, their new flagship flight controller. During the testing period, the VTB regularly provided feedback to Thrustmaster on how we felt the stick was performing, suggesting improvements, troubleshooting the TARGET programming software, and building a solid knowledge base. We're proud to say that we're now flying exclusively using the HOTAS Warthog.



2010 saw additional changes, including a switch to Lock On: Flaming Cliffs 2 (FC2), however we didn't get a chance to perform our demo due to unforeseen circumstances. With the aforementioned changes to both the hardware and software used to fly, the team certainly wasn't lacking enthusiasm to get back *in the loop*.

Enter 2011. Time is still far from abundant, and as most of you know, it demands a significant commitment to put the demo back together. While getting a 6-ship formation airborne proved elusive, about two months ago the flying kicked into a higher gear through sheer grit, determination and resiliency. The momentum picked up quickly as we began several building block sorties through the use of Phantom Control (PhC). This meant we were able to maximize the efficiency of our time spent together. Two weeks ago, we put the delta formation together for the first time in over a year as we flew our first full High Show of the 2011 training season.



The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds have added two new maneuvers to their demo this season and so have the VTB. Other improvements include the use of an F-16 flight model in FC2. Although we're still sporting the Eagle cockpit, our performance data and fuel burn matches that of a real Viper very closely. Since this change, the team has rewritten its SOPs to fly using the real world parameters flown by the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, pulling 4G formation loops at airspeeds approaching 500mph, without sacrificing the ever important smoothness, control and predictability.



While the majority of the team is taking to the skies for regular practices again there are still members who remain busy with real life issues. One of them is Gunner, and therefore we now have a new pilot flying in the diamond formation, Teej. He has rightfully earned the role as VTB2. Gunner will continue as VTB7, supporting the team during live shows and practices as our safety observer. It would be remiss if we did not thank Gunner for his exemplary dedication to the team's best interest and its mission. Teej has some big boots to fill, but has already laced them up tight.

With training season in progress, we look forward to opportunities for live shows. Let's just say the team has a goal in mind for the not so distant future...

"Dr. Sky" to interview Whack, VTB5

On April 27 at 1600E, VTB5 is scheduled for a telephone interview by TV and radio personality "Dr. Sky".

Steve Kates—"Dr. Sky" can be seen on programs such as 3TV's "Good Morning Arizona" and Fox 10's "Arizona Morning" sharing the secrets of the night sky and other related aviation topics. In the radio realm Steve Kates has been a contributor to such programs as KFYI's "Wake up Arizona" and has been a regular with KXAM's 1310AM radio personality Bill Straus, "Straus' Place". Keep your eyes in the sky and be sure to look for this interview as a download becomes available.

<http://www.drsky.com>



"In The Loop" is the Virtual Thunderbirds Quarterly Newsletter.

Video Release

- Sunday, April 17 look for yet another new video released in 1080p available also on YouTube and Vimeo

New Additions to Website

- Newsletter archive
- Video (1080p HD)

Pilots with New Numbers

- Teej, VTB2
- Gunner, VTB7

Watch for the Next Issue of our Newsletter due out this **summer**