

WestFAC 2025 Report – Mike Kelly

23-26 October saw intrepid flyers giving their all over the lush alfalfa fields of Rovey Farms at the tenth WestFAC. Mornings were breezy, but each day around noon the breeze died down and afternoon conditions were excellent. Seventeen flyers competed in a total of 24 events over three days of flying. Here are some photos and tales of heroism and misadventure from the meet – all the results and scores will be in the Jan-Feb 2026 FAC newsletter:

Dave Semeraro brought a small fleet of brand new models to the contest (who hasn't done that?). Here's his beautiful Dave Stott-designed P-51B all done up in Paul Mantz racing colors. Dave got some nice trim flights in on Wednesday and Thursday, then the gremlins bit and a carelessly placed foot crushed one wing – what a shame!



Semeraro photo



Kelly photo

Dave had better luck with his stunning Mike Nassise designed Kingfisher dimer. Resplendent in pre-war

yellow wings colors the model trimmed up just fine and gave Dave some great flights in Dime Scale.



Kelly photo

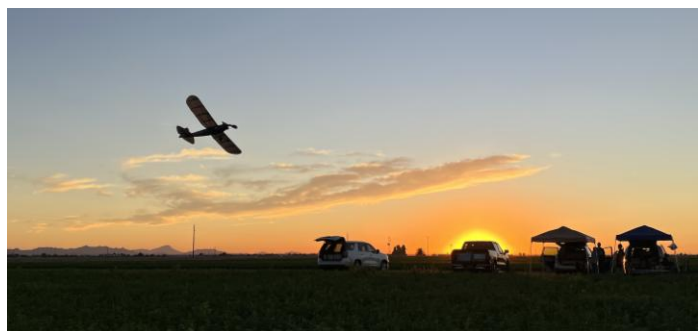


Kelly photo



Kelly photo

Wednesday evening was dead calm, perfect for checking whether the dry desert air had affected models' trim. Here's Mike Kelly's Heath Midwing cruising around in front of another beautiful Arizona sunset.



Thursday morning was calm enough that many flyers tested their ships before heading to the hotel for judging. Here's Phil Sullivan with his impressive 2x Mooney peanut Miles Sparrowhawk. Landing gear is held on with magnets. After one long low approach Phil found one wheel pant missing and was unable to find it. Miraculously, an hour or so later Allen Shields walked up to the flightline and yelled "anybody missing their gear?".



Kelly photo

Dave Wagner launches one of his Cold War contenders, a beautifully-finished Stinson L-5 in air ambulance configuration.



Kelly Photo

Mike Keller tunes up his Hellcat in preparation for WWII Combat.



Kelly photo

Judging started at 1 PM on Thursday, was great to see the room filled with a wide variety of models. Many thanks to all the folks who helped set up the room and judge.



Here's Walt Ainslie's Crosby CR-4, built from a P.T. Aviation short kit. This model is huge, with a 24" span and nearly 30" fuselage. Lots of room for rubber! Walt had carefully marked a full set of rivets on the fuselage.



Nunez photo

Bob Hodes and Dave Semeraro handled the peanut and jetcat judging. Tom Arnold's Canberra gets a close look.



Nunez photo

CD Tom Arnold looks over the racers, with Cold War entries on the tables to the right.



Hodes Photo

Friday morning's first event was the WWI combat Mass Launch. From left to right, Pat Murray with his Fokker DVII, Dave Wagner with his Junkers, Jonathan Nunez with his Se.5, Walt Ainslie with a Bristol Scout, and Bob Hodes with another DVII. In the first round Pat's DVII had a great long flight, but was blown into the wires southwest of the field suffering catastrophic damage and knocking him out of the remaining rounds.



Semeraro photo

Friday's other mass launch was the Race Plane Unlimited event. This special event allows any racer from any era at any size, and proved quite popular. Contenders were (left to right) Pat Murray (CR-3), Dave Wagner (P-39 Cobra II), Mike Kelly (Lucky Gallon Corsair), Jonathan Nunez (Keith Rider Firecracker), Walt Ainslie (Crosby CR-4), Tom Arnold (Tucker's 1949 P-63), Bob Hodes (CR-3).



Richardson photo

Pat and Tom torqued in on the first round, and Dave Wagner's Cobra II went missing (later found) in the second round after a fantastic flight. Mike's Corsair got spit out of a thermal well before Bob's CR-3 in the final round, but held on in the glide to land just two seconds after Bob's model for its first Unlimited Racer win, having missed first place by less than two seconds in each of the previous two years.

Pat Murray braved the breezes early and put up some monster flights for FAC Rubber Scale and Double Trouble TOTF with his stunning Yak-2 twin. One flight was more than 100 seconds, and drifted past the alfalfa and cow pasture to land safely just 30 feet from a very active road.



Richardson photo

Mike Kelly also got some good flights in FAC Scale and Double Trouble TOTF from his Diels Tigercat. Here's Phil Sullivan getting strafed as Mike trimmed the model with larger cross-section motors.



Kelly photo

Phil Sullivan made the first-ever flights with the prototype of Mike Isermann's new "Black Sunshine" embryo. After some handheld trim flights he got the model to make qualifying ROG flights. The flights looked quite good – this will be one to watch out for in the future!



Kelly photo

Bob Hodes took advantage of the alfalfa to fly his delicate Voison Hydroplane canard pusher. Lots of bonus points with this model!



Nunez photo

Friday morning brought the premier mass launch event, WWII Combat! Nine flyers took to the field (left-right) Mike Richardson (Hurricane), Bob Hodes (EKW), Dave Wagner (P-47), Mike Keller (Hellcat), Tom Arnold (P-63, of course!), Jonathan Nunez (Hein), Pat Murray (Avenger number 6), Mike Kelly (Spitfire), Walt Ainslie (Heinkel).



Semeraro photo

After the first two rounds Jonathan Nunez and Pat Murray were the last men standing.



Kelly photo

Jonathan's immaculate Hein outlasted the Avenger to take the win. Jonathan built this model more than ten years ago, had several podium finishes, and recently refurbished it. This was its first WWII Combat Kanone! Note the determination on the faces in this final round launch.



Kelly photo

Mike Jester as usual flew most all of the endurance events. After numerous traipses through the alfalfa he enlisted Tom Arnold's grandson Quinn to shag models. Quinn did a great job – here he is with Mike's Korda Victory.



Jester photo

The next mass launch was a flyer-favorite carryover from last year's John Hutchison Memorial meet, the 2x Walt Mooney peanut event. Here are the contenders (left-right) Bob Hodes (Skyraider), Dave Semeraro (Vagabond), Walt Ainslie (Defender), Mike Keller (Itoh), Mike Kelly (Wicko) and Mike Jester (Centennial). Phil Sullivan and Dave Wagner also had 2x Mooney models but didn't make it to the mass launch for various reasons.



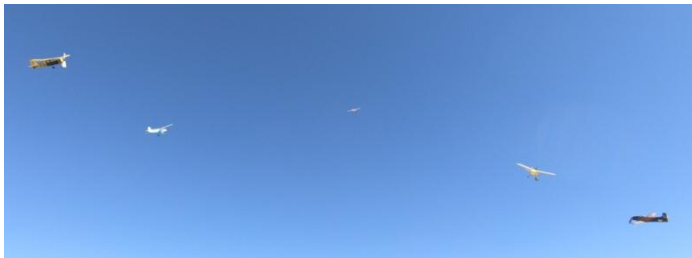
Semeraro photo

As Mass Launch Director, Mike Richardson (right) had the unenviable task of getting the fliers lined up and facing the wind. Here he cajoles Dave and Barb Semeraro into position.



Kelly photo

After a bit of fun and lots of good-natured banter folks lined up and launched on Mike's command. This shot catches Bob Hode's Skyraider and Mike Jester's Centennial crossing from opposite sides as the Itoh, Wicko and Vagabond fly straight out from the launch line.



Kelly Photo

Mike Keller, Mike Kelly and Dave Semeraro made it to the final round, Mike Keller (left) and his Itoh came out on top. He's having a bit of trouble taking his competitors seriously here...



Semeraro photo

After-hours each day saw folks enjoying just putting models into the air. Here Tom Arnold coaches Quinn as he winds Tom's P-63. Quinn had a ball the entire weekend, getting some great flights from a variety of models.



Jester photo

Jonathan Nunez was joined by his fellow SpaceX engineer Julie, shown here launching one of Jonathan's models.



Nunez photo

Rob Ambrose came out to spectate in this gorgeous 1961 Corvette. He declined to offer it as the prize for Grand Champion...



Nunez photo

Jonathan Nunez managed to park his Peck peanut P-51 (say that five times fast) on top of Rod Person's travel trailer. He decided flying it off the trailer was safer than carrying it down the ladder – good call!



Nunez photo

Sunday brought the Cold War, Double Trouble and Flying Horde mass launches along with the Cold War and Double Trouble TOTF events, Jetcat and Jimmy Allen/2-Bit+1. Once again the weather was breezy first thing, calming down around noon for another fantastic afternoon of flying over the alfalfa.

Somehow we didn't seem to get a group shot for the Cold War mass launch. Here we see the spectators gleefully watching Mike Kelly's F-105 auger in as the pilots and timers of models actually flying stick to their duties, with Mass Launch Director Rod Persons (foreground right) keeping a close eye on the proceedings.



Kelly photo.

Here's a different perspective of the first round – left to right Dave Wagner's immaculate Yugoslavian Sturmovik climbs out smoothly, Walt Ainslie's T-28D declares "fights on!" and turns in on Jonathan Nunez's Laotian Bird Dog as Mike's F-105 rockets up on full afterburner (it came down nearly as fast as it went up).



Semeraro photo

Jonathan did well with his Bird Dog, battling it out with Walt's T-28 in the final round. Further details are unavailable because as everyone knows, we were never operating in Laos...



Semeraro photo

Double Trouble mass launch is unique to WestFAC (why is that?) and always fun and impressive. Here Bob Hodes (F-82), Pat Murray (Yak-2) and Mike Kelly (Tigercat) clown around while waiting for Tom Arnold to finish winding his AJ Savage (not pictured).

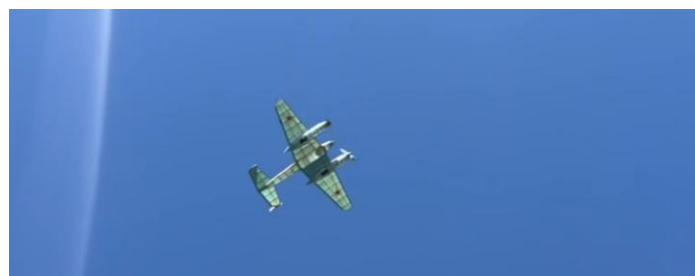


Nunez photo

Tom broke a motor and Bob had a bad launch, leaving Pat and Mike to fight it out. Pat's Yak came out of his hand and cranked into an alarmingly tight low-level circle as Mike's 'cat climbed smugly away. However, the mighty Yak kept itself just above the alfalfa until the torque burned off, then smoothly cruised over the now-gliding Tigercat, staying aloft to take the win for Pat and coming down inches from the barbed wire fence around the cow pasture.

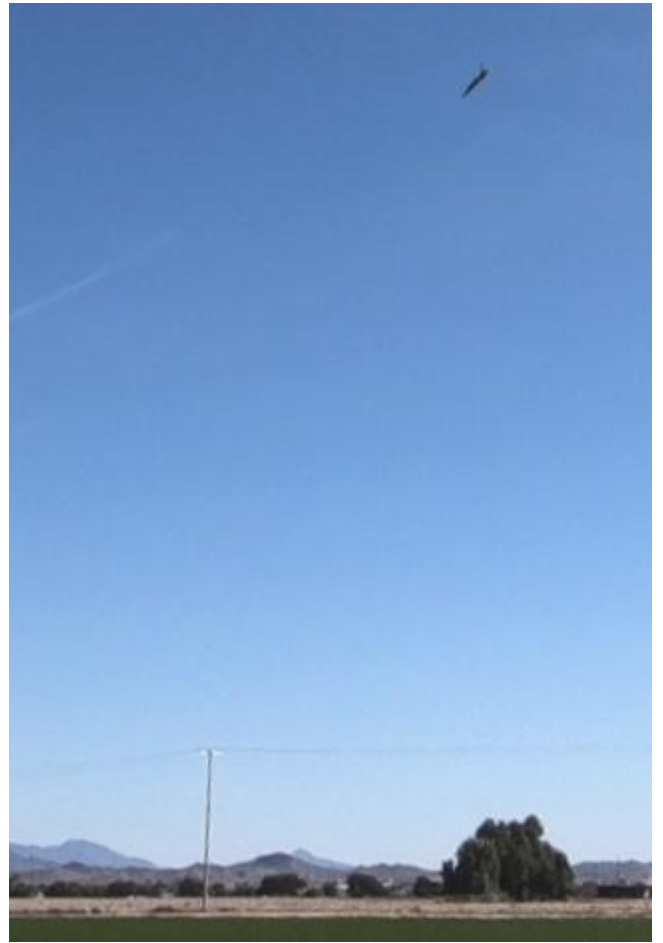


Richardson photo



Richardson photo

Mike Kelly's F-105 made a valiant attempt to get a qualifying time for Cold War Total of Three Flight, but it was not to be. After surviving a few trim flights Mike wound it up and launched. Climb out looked good, until the model slowed, completely swapped ends, then nosed down and accelerated into the ground. Speculation is too much down and left thrust, not enough decalage. More repairs... (Kelly photos)



Allen Shields had some great flights from his He-280 jetcat. One was a bit too good, flying across the road never to be found.



Kelly photo

Barb Semeraro built and brought three jetcats for WestFAC this year, entering her beautifully finished Blue Angels F-4 Phantom and Japanese Baka while holding her unpainted F-15 for future events. Nice height on the F-4 launch!



Nunez photo



Semeraro photo



Semeraro photo

The final mass launch was Sunday afternoon's Flying Horde. Left to right: Rod Persons (unknown model), Barb Semeraro (Blue Ridge Special), Walt Ainslie (Miss World's Fair embryo) and Mike Keller (Embryomatic embryo) faced off for the one-round all-or-nothing match.



Semeraro photo

These are just a few highlights from another outstanding and memorable session at Rovey Farms. Huge thanks and kudos to Jerry Rovey for hosting us, Tom Arnold for organizing and CDing the meet, Tom's daughter Kati Millhouse for running the scores table, Rod Persons for running the field activities and all the flyers, spouses and guests that pitched in to make it happen.

Dave Wagner earned the Walt Mooney peanut scale trophy for best FAC Peanut Scale score flying his Goon. Here Tom Arnold presents the trophy to Dave with Rod Persons proferring.



Semeraro photo

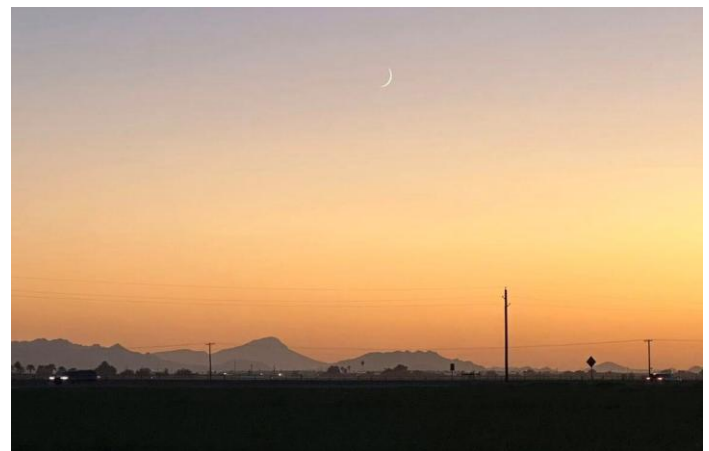
Grand Champion for WestFAC 2025 is Pat Murray, shown here accepting the Mike Midkiff Trophy from Tom Arnold.



Jester photo

That wraps up this report, not that there weren't plenty of other events to cover and stories to tell. Full results will be published in the Jan-Feb 2026 issue of the FAC newsletter and eventually posted on the WesternFAC.com website (along with more photos from the festivities).

Until next time...



Nunez photo