



Aircraft: NXT Generation

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To reach this year's National Championship Air Races at Stead Field in Reno, Nev., Jon Sharp, accompanied by his wife, Patricia, flew the 450 miles from his office in Mojave, Calif., in his Nemesis NXT, a sleek, white monoplane. Three days later, he piloted that same plane to a third-place finish in a field of 25 in the Sport Class division. It is a scenario comparable to Michael Schumacher driving his Formula One Ferrari to a Monaco Grand Prix with a guest in the passenger seat and a couple changes of clothes packed in the trunk—if Schumacher also had designed the car, and if that car had a passenger seat or space for luggage.

As Sharp demonstrated with his September trip to the air races, his Nemesis NXT is an all-purpose aircraft in which the pilot can compete or commute. Sharp prefers the former. "It was very painful just putting along like that," he says of the flight from Mojave to Reno, which was slowed to 190 mph because the NXT was flying in company with a Beech Bonanza piloted by a friend of his. "Normally we'd cruise at about 310 mph." At the air races, Sharp, after trading the jeans and polo shirt that he wore during the flight from Mojave for a fireproof Nomex jumpsuit and a helmet, reached a conservative top speed of 324 mph, enough for the plane to pull 3 g's while banking left or right.

Sharp, president of Nemesis Air Racing, a company that builds the NXT and races the plane in competition, is an 11-time champion in Formula One, an international class of air racing. He sought new challenges after retiring the DR90, with which he won all of those titles, to the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. (The plane, which was donated in 1999, is on display at the museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center at Washington's Dulles International Airport.) In 2000, he and his team of designers—many of whom are former Lockheed engineers like himself—began working on an aircraft for the recently created Sport Class division, which limits engine sizes to 650 cu in and requires that the competing plane be one of at least five models available for purchase.

The new composite two-passenger aircraft, which was completed in the spring of 2004 and has been certified by the FAA, can cruise at 300 mph for nearly 1,000 miles, and its top speed approaches 400 mph. Powered by a twin-turbo, 350 hp, 6-cylinder Lycoming TIO-540 engine or a normally aspirated 300 hp version of the same engine, the NXT can climb 4,000 feet per minute to a 25,000-foot ceiling.

The NXT is available as a kit requiring construction for \$129,500. Ready-to-fly production models cost from \$250,000 to \$300,000 depending on the engine package and avionics. "It's a daily-driver airplane," Sharp says. "Just turn up the rpm a little bit, make more horsepower, go faster, and race."

Nemesis Air Racing

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— Jan Tegler

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