



Kiwi Skies to American Midwest: The NZ F3A Team's 2025 World Championship Journey

The 2025 F3A Precision Aerobatics World Championship took place in early August at the world-class, 1,100-acre AMA Aeromodelling Centre in Muncie, Indiana USA attracting 62 competitors from 23 nations

The New Zealand team was selected at the Masters held at Hamilton in February. The team comprised Fraser Briggs, John Knox, and Hamish Galloway and Sean Galloway flying as a Junior.

Team Manager Brian Dooley was supported by Ross Craighead and Trina Briggs as helpers/supporters. The team's expertise was further recognised when Noeline Craighead was invited by the organizers to act as an official judge for the competition.

As is usual for New Zealand teams competing in Northern Hemisphere events, critical practice was severely hampered by typical NZ winter weather. Models were meticulously prepared, and some practice flights completed, but the pilots were unable to train consistently in conditions expected in a hot, humid Midwest summer.

To counter this, the team's strategic plan was to travel to Michigan for five days of intensive, high-level practice with Andrew Jesky, a multiple US national champion (and future World Champion). Travel was via San Francisco to Detroit, and it was at SFO that the first logistical problem occurred: airport security screening tried to check inside the model boxes after they were checked through to Detroit. One member had used Torx screws to hold the lid on one of his boxes, and the technology was beyond the TSA. This resulted in the team missing the connecting flight and a 10-hour delay, making a very long day even longer. Some very expensive "team building" took place at various refreshment outlets in the terminal while waiting for the red-eye flight!

The Jesky extended family made the team extremely welcome, and their local knowledge allowed the team to hit the ground running. The team stayed in an Airbnb in southern Michigan and utilized two local fields: the Toledo Weak Signals club (with a clubhouse and tarmac runway) and the Down River club (a farm grass airstrip in the

*Top:
NZ Team at Weak Signals RC practicing.
Below:
Opening Ceremony*





middle of a soybean field). The weather was basically perfect, except for a couple of days when smoke from fires in Canada filled the sky, enabling a high volume of flying, with most pilots getting 10 or more flights daily. Crucially, Andrew's coaching focused on the subtle, high-scoring details, this training was invaluable for reducing the small but costly errors. The equipment held together remarkably well, with only a few minor technical issues to resolve.

The team elected to stay in Michigan an extra day and flew until late in the afternoon before beginning the drive to Muncie, about three and a half hours southwest, arriving a day before official registration. They settled into another Airbnb, this one within five minutes of the competition site.

Official Practice, Registration & Opening Ceremony

Each team had been allocated a practice site, all of which were approximately one hour's drive from Muncie. The New Zealand team's allocated field, shared with the German and Polish teams, was the Darke County Aeromodellers just across the state line in Ohio. On registration day, the team drove to this field and flew until it was time to return to the Aeromodelling Centre for registration and the team managers meeting.

Registration was straightforward, and the team managers meeting revealed nothing unusual. The draw for the preliminary rounds had each team flying on one flight line every day; this negated having to hop between flight lines during the day and eased the logistical load on the teams.

Team NZ was scheduled to fly their official practice flights last on the contest site to be followed by model processing. Each team was allocated 10 minutes per pilot and by making efficient use of this time 5 flights were completed with Sean having two. Immediately after these flights, the team moved to the Aeromodelling Museum facility where processing took place. This is a critical administrative step: documentation was checked,

models were accurately weighed and measured to confirm they met FAI specifications, and failsafe settings were checked. Once complete, the team was officially ready for the competition.

The opening ceremony was held on the field and the teams marched on with their national anthems playing. Flags were raised and after a brief welcoming speech from the President of the FAI the Championship was declared open. Fellow aeromodeller and professional airshow pilot RJ Gritter gave a very aggressive low level aerobatic display in his full-size Decathlon, and the stage was set for six days of intense competition.

The Preliminary Rounds

The preliminary rounds consisted of four flights, with the best three scores to count, each pilot flew one flight per day. Two flight lines were used, alternating between them, to ensure equal exposure to the two judging panels. The New Zealand team was drawn with almost equal spacing between pilots, meaning they were flying throughout the whole day as the draw rotated between rounds.

The weather remained excellent throughout the contest, around 30degC and maximum wind of 10km/hr. The good conditions meant a consistently high standard of flying. In such an elite field of 62 pilots, small, correctable errors could make a huge difference to the ranking. For example, a slight wing-rock at the end of a straight line, or a vertical segment that wasn't perfectly plumb due to an uncorrected wind drift, might only warrant a minor deduction, but these small score losses could easily push a pilot down five or ten positions overall.

Overall, the team flew consistently and to the potential that they demonstrated during practice. The results of the preliminary rounds were Frazer 26th, Hamish 34th, Sean 41st, John 49th. The top 30 advanced to the semi-finals, meaning only Frazer made the cut. Margins were very tight, and given the high calibre of the competition, either Hamish or Sean could have easily made the semi-finals with just a few extra points.

The Semifinals

A spare day was allocated between the preliminary and semi-finals rounds. This provided time for the top 30 competitors, including Frazer, to practice the significantly more difficult 'F' semi-finals schedule, and for the judges to undergo additional training.

For his critical final training day, Frazer and the team moved to the Tipton County Radio Control Club, a small grass field located about an hour's drive northwest of Muncie, which they had exclusive use of. Frazer flew all day with Hamish calling, and debriefing between each of 14 flights. Sean kept the charged batteries coming so the only interruption was when an Air Tractor crop duster sprayed the adjacent soybean field. As the day went on, Frazer's execution of the final schedule improved dramatically, setting him up for the next phase of the competition.

The semi-finals consisted of two flights flown in front of each judges panel, utilising the more complex 'F' schedule. Out of the 30 semi-finalists, only the top 10 competitors would advance to the Finals round. Frazer entered the competition feeling confident after his focused practice day. He put in two solid flights in the semi-finals, demonstrating his ability to rise to the increased complexity and pressure of the 'F' schedule. This excellent performance saw him advance six places in the overall semi-final result, finishing in 20th position. This strong ranking represents the highest placement by any New Zealander at an F3A World Championship to date, a remarkable achievement for Frazer and the team.

The Finals

In the Finals rounds, the top 10 pilots advanced to the ultimate flights on the final day. The Finals consisted of two unknown schedules, which were only revealed to the pilots the night before, and one 'F' schedule flight. All three flights counted for the total score, as there were no drop rounds. The unknown schedules are the ultimate test of pilot skill, demanding rapid memorization, visualization, and flawless execution under immense pressure—a true measure of the world's elite.

Once again, conditions were almost perfect, and the standard of flying was unbelievably high; anyone of the 10 pilots would have been worthy champion. For the first time in nearly 3 weeks Team NZ had a day off as spectators watching intently the performance of our mentor Andrew.

When the final scores were tallied, the new World Champion was crowned: a highly deserving Andrew Jesky from the USA, whose years of dedication finally paid off. Second place went to the 2023 World Champion, Lassi Nurila of Finland, and third place was secured by 2017 world Champion Tetsuo Onda from Japan.

In the Team Competition, the United States won gold, with Japan taking silver and Austria claiming bronze. The New Zealand team placed a very credible eighth overall, demonstrating the depth and rising consistency of the entire national squad.



Top to bottom:
Hamish and Sean Galloway in the ready box
Sean Galloway on the podium Bronze Junior

Junior pilot Sean Galloway also secured a significant success by winning the bronze medal for finishing third in the Junior competition. These combined efforts—Frazer's highest-ever individual ranking, the eighth-place team finish, and Sean's international bronze—concluded a successful and historic campaign for the NZ F3A team in Muncie.

Prize Giving and Departure

Prize giving began with the medal presentations at the field following the last flights of the Finals, recognizing the winners in the individual, team, and junior and team categories. Other, more formal awards were presented at the official banquet held that evening in Muncie. With the formalities completed, it was time to say farewell to friends and competitors from all over the world, with the hope of seeing them again in two years. The location for the next World Championship is yet to be decided.

The New Zealand team then split up for some much-needed relaxation and sightseeing. The Craigheads headed for Europe, the Briggs family went to Yellowstone National Park, looking for bears and enjoying the scenery, while the rest of the team drove down to Dayton to visit the fantastic Museum of the United States Air Force. They spent nearly two full days exploring the extensive aviation history exhibits before driving back to Detroit for the flight home.

However, the team's international travel saga was not quite over. Back at Detroit airport, the team asked for the model boxes to be inspected under supervision to avoid a repeat of the initial delay. Despite the request, the inspection proved to be exceptionally intense and took so long that the flight was missed anyway. Such, it seems, is the life of a traveling aeromodeller.

Team Support

Attending an event such as this is major undertaking for the individual members but the team received incredible support from many in the New Zealand Aeromodelling Community.

MFNZ, by way of the competition fund, provided a grant which was used to help cover the entry fees. An indication of the value of this expenditure might be the team Facebook page which had 400+ followers with one particularly famous video having 1000 views in 24 hrs!

Steve Johnson produced the logos and designed the uniforms many of which were sold to supporters both at home and overseas raising significant funding. Helping with model preparation over the long winter were Paul Tomlinson, Ewan Galloway, Lyndon Perry and many others.

A World Championship campaign is always a memorable experience but the way this team presented itself and performed made this event one to cherish.

Immediately below:

Andrew Jesky the new F3A World Champion

Bottom:

Team NZ after the Semi Finals

