



AROUND THE WORLD IN 100 DAYS...IN A 1940S PLANE

News / Personalities



Nestled between the multi-million dollar passenger airliners and the sophisticated, deadly military aircraft at the Dubai Airshow stands an out-of-place looking vintage 1942 biplane. But at the controls of the aircraft sits a woman with an incredible tale of adventure.

Tracy Curtis Taylor, 53, is making a stop in Dubai as part of a 12- to 14-week, 21,000km solo-flight in her Boeing Stearman "Spirit of Artemis" biplane, which began on October 1 at Farnborough Airport in Hampshire, UK.

By the time she is expected to arrive in Sydney, Australia, she will have flown across 23 countries, including a long Middle Eastern leg, which has already taken her to Cyprus, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and now Dubai.

In an interview, Taylor told Khaleej Times her flight was inspired by British aviator Amy Johnson, who in 1930 became the first female "aviatrix" to fly from Britain to Australia alone, which she accomplished over the span of 19 days.

"She basically crashed her way to Australia, with all sorts of adventures on the way, like flying over Iraq in sandstorms, in monsoons in Burma, and flipping on her final landing in Australia," Taylor said.

"Her achievement is astounding. Even today it has real resonance. She's a fantastic role model and I think it's important that this generation understand her incredible bravery and determination."

On her own trip, Taylor -- who first began flying at the age of 16 -- said she's particularly enjoyed the portions of the flight taken over the Middle East. "Flying low through Saudi Arabia low-level through the Arabian desert was one of the finest experiences of the flight," she said.

"Flying the Dead Sea at 15 feet escorted by an F-16 military pilot in another Boeing Stearman was out of this world." But Taylor's adventure has not come without challenges. "There's a huge political dimension to it, and there's so much bureaucracy that it's mind damaging, frankly," she said.

"But my single biggest challenge is the weather. I'm slow and very vulnerable in an open cockpit. I just can't get caught in heavy rain or thunderstorms. As the winter kicked in in Eastern Europe, I was stuck in Romania for four days, and flew through some really tricky weather in Saudi Arabia, flying low in the desert in fog. That's the biggest risk."

Standing just metres away from some of the world's latest and most technologically advanced military fighter planes, Taylor noted there is something special about flying in a Boeing Stearman -- variants of which first took flight in the 1920s.

"I just love the whole romantic adventure of it. They're wonderful flying machines," she said. "They're beautiful and they have so much character. With an open cockpit, it's the real, visceral experience of flight. You fly low and get to see the world in a way very few people get to experience it."

From Dubai, Taylor -- who has also undertaken long-distance flights -- plans to continue her journey to Oman. "Then I go across the Gulf to Pakistan, then on to a big communications and outreach programme in India for 12 days," she said.

"Beyond that it's Bangladesh, on to Burma, through Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and finally into Australia."

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