



# Peggy Krainz; Wing-Walker

Contributed by Chris Gee

Chris Gee reports on an interview he obtained with Wing-Walker Peggy Krainz after her performance at Warbirds Over Wanaka in April.

**FOLLOWING** in the footsteps of legendary 1920s Barnstormers such as Ormer Locklear and Ethal Dare, Peggy Krainz has been wing-walking since 1999, but New Zealanders have had to wait until 2010 for Peggy's debut at Warbirds over Wanaka. Hailing from Stuttgart in Germany, Peggy received her pilot's license in 1997 and is now a qualified Instructor. As well as performing at over 350 aviation events she has also taken part in motion-picture stunt work.

## The first adventure

Peggy's wing-walking adventures started in 1998 when she witnessed a wing-walking performance at an airshow and asked the pilot if she could have a go. She turned out to be a natural and soon began a journey that eventually led to her purchasing her own aircraft (a Boeing E75 Stearman) in 2005 and starting her own wing-walking team. Since 2006 her pilot, and partner, has been Friedrich "Friedel" Walentin, who has been flying since he was just 13 years old.

Peggy finds it difficult to express what that first time outside of the aircraft was like back in 1998; "It's hard to explain, it was 11 years ago. It's like when you make your first solo flight - it's amazing. I was only standing on the top of the wing strapped in and it was only a short flight of about 2 minutes. I was smiling afterwards and I was like "Oh please I want to do it again!"

Over the years Peggy grew more confident and eventually began climbing out onto the wing, but this was not something that came so easily.

"The first thing you have to learn is to climb into the aircraft before landing for safety, then it took five years before I could get out onto the wings. I spent two weeks

just sitting in the hanger practicing climbing out and then back in, over and over..."

## Safety and Fitness

Although the wing walking is certainly a courageous endeavour, Peggy is still attached to the aircraft at every point of her routine.



Wing-Walker Peggy Krainz and Pilot Friedrich Walentin performing in their Boeing Stearman to an appreciative audience at Warbirds Over Wanaka 2010.



Wing-walking is also very physically demanding, and fatigue can set in quickly. "It's hard work. It can be cold outside but it's not cold for me because it is such hard work. We fly at between 150 to 260 kph, and it is especially hard work is to get out onto the wing, because for the first 1.5 meters you have the wind from the

propeller in addition to the airspeed of the plane. Friedel has to pull the throttle back almost all the way, otherwise it would not be possible."

Although there have never been any mishaps since she started wing-walking, Peggy recalls times that set her heart racing.

"You need high concentration. Sometimes if the weather is bad it can be difficult. If I am climbing out onto the lower wing, but it is too bumpy, I can give a sign to Friedel and we can cancel it. About 8 years ago I looked back and saw my safety line was not connected to the aircraft. It was just flapping away behind me not connected to anything... but at this time I was only performing on the top of the wing, so we continued the show... No one knew there was a problem."

## Travelling to NZ

Bringing the Boeing Stearman to New Zealand proved to be quite a logistical challenge for Peggy and Friedel. Normally in Europe the aircraft can simply be flown between

airshows, but for anything over 1000 miles away it has to be packed into a container. This puts the aircraft out of commission for a long time. The aircraft had to leave Europe on the 16th of January in order to arrive at Wanaka on time for the Airshow in April, with another 2 1/2 days required for reassembly. Work has recently begun to refurbish a second Boeing Stearman so they can leave one in Europe for the airshows there while the other plane transits to more exotic locations. Peggy and Friedel hope the refurbishments will be completed soon after they return from Wanaka so that the

"I have a safety line 2.5 meters long which is always connected to the aircraft. It's for my head really, and the insurance company... I have never had to use the safety line but it can get complicated for me during the flight. The safety line can turn around in the wind or get caught up in my feet, but I still have to have it."

Peggy admits that even the safety line doesn't eliminate the risk. "If I fall off, I cannot get back in the airplane... I would hang in the middle of the fuselage and Friedrich would have to land with me dangling there."

aircraft is available for the start of their European airshow schedule. "It is virtually identical to our current aircraft, except that it has four ailerons and also a starter. We have to hand start this one..."

The aircraft they brought to New Zealand has also been recently refurbished after suffering severe hail damage in Italy, a harrowing story by Peggy's account.

"The weather was fine, so everybody left their aircraft outside, then overnight a storm came over the mountains and our aircraft and many others received damage from the hail. It was very messy. We patched it up with tape and flew it back to Germany the next day."

The Boeing Stearman has become a favourite with wing-walkers all over the world, since it matches two critical criteria - it is a Biplane and it has plenty of horse power.

"The Stearman is equipped with a strong 450 HP engine, so it has enough power to fly with a wing-walker, and also to fly aerobatics with a wing-walker. I can take away 150HP from the power of the aircraft when I am outside!" Peggy explains.

As well as performing solo displays, Peggy and Friedel often perform with a team of other wing-walkers. "I enjoy flying as a team. The teams are all very friendly with each other. It's very different - more about formation flying with us dancing in time together on the wings. I really enjoy it"

## The Wanaka drawcard

The chance to perform at Warbirds over Wanaka has been a long time ambition of Peggy's. "We perform nowadays at about 20 or 25 airshows a year, and we try to get to a few airshows outside Europe each year, but especially this place. I have heard about this Airshow all over the world. I first heard about it 15 years ago and then I started working towards this one about 5 years ago. And now it is a dream to be here."

After the airshow Peggy and Friedel had some time to take in Wanaka's stunning scenery and they have raved about their New Zealand experience. "We enjoyed our time in Wanaka so much. We loved to fly there and we are very proud to perform at this great Airshow. We have found some new friends and hope we will come back sometime soon!"

Hopefully New Zealand audiences will not have to wait long before Peggy and Friedel grace our skies a second time.

For more information visit Peggy and Friedrich's website:

[www.wing-walkers.de](http://www.wing-walkers.de)

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