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Give 'em a brake: Blue Angel visits airport to test emergency system

By Jack T. Anderson For the West Yellowstone News

The Blue Angels' Angel 7 came swooping in to the Yellowstone Airport Tuesday, as preparation for the Idaho Falls Air Show this weekend. The nationwide aerial acrobats are using the airport as their emergency landing space during the show.

In order to provide this emergency space for the pilots, an arresting barrier had to be installed earlier this week at the airport.

"They have to have one of the (arresting barriers) within a certain distance of that air field (where they are performing,)" Tony Bean, airport manager, said.

With speeds reaching up to 700 mph during the show, the Boeing F/A-18 Hornets used by the Angels need a little extra help slowing down in case of an emergency. At these speeds it only takes around 10 minutes to get from Idaho Falls to West.

The arresting barrier, installed at the airport by the Red Horse Squadron out of Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, is much like one that would be used on an aircraft carrier.

The jet drops a hook from behind the landing gear that scoops up a large cable stretched across the runway, called the pendant. This cable has large rubber grommets on it to lift the cable high enough to be caught by the jet. The cable is connected to large flat strips that resemble enormous tow straps, called barrier tape.

These straps then feed into two large braking systems on either side of the runway. There are large coils of this strap in the aircraft arresting system, which extend rapidly and then build up resistance to pull back on the jet and slow it.

Each arresting system is anchored deep in the ground with large flat platform pieces, the same components sometimes used to create runways in the field. They are angled away from the braking system and keep everything tightly in place.

"They did a powered run out to make sure it doesn't go left or right," Bean said.

The jet came in to test the barrier and to certify it before the air show. It took less than 20 minutes, according to Bean.

"It's hard to put (an arresting barrier) in Idaho Falls where there's a lot of traffic," Bean said. "We can land anything down there (in the Yellowstone Airport.)"

The Yellowstone Airport has one of the longest runways in the country, coming out to 8,400 feet of landing space. Currently the airport is running fire aid to Idaho with planes leaving roughly every 15 to 30 minutes.

However, Bean agreed to have the barrier installed at the airport to support community air shows.

The Idaho Air Show will feature several different acts along with the Blue Angels and is scheduled Saturday to Sunday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information go to www.idahofallsairshow.com.

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