



# Gary Ward

## ...and Paul Lopez...and Freddie Cabanas, kind of.

Story by Jeff Parnau

Sun'n Fun isn't the first show of the season, but it's unofficially considered the annual beginning of airshows in the contiguous 48. This year, three MX2s were at the Florida gathering – two in the airshow and one in the display area. I got a ride in most of them!

On airshow Thursday, Paul Lopez gave me my first inside (and upside down) look at this fantastic machine with a ride in the factory demo. In addition to flying at airshows, Paul flies in the Advanced category of the International Aerobatic Club (IAC). He took me through shoulder rolls, tailslides, hammerheads, a demonstration of the MX2's 420-degree roll rate (wow!), and a little "hanging on the prop" (commonly called the Harrier Hover).

The most bizarre ability of this aircraft has to do with the vertical upline. The 380-hp engine, coupled with full-span ailerons, gives the aircraft vertical roll authority at zero airspeed. Paul said it would probably be capable of a reverse torque roll, which might not impress the general public, but would totally confuse a true aerobatic buff.

Paul gave me the stick and rudders for a bit. Being a Skybolt driver, I immediately and grossly over controlled. When I finally completed a 90 degree turn without banging my head on the canopy, I gave the controls back to Paul, thank you.

On Sunday, Gary Ward invited me to witness the MX2's tumbling ability. The two-place MX2 (that's what the "2" means) puts both pilot and passenger behind the center of gravity, and Gary said that the more-rearward center of gravity contributes to a tighter, faster tumble. But shortly after takeoff, we heard Freddie Cabanas on the discrete frequency,



Top: Gary Ward and his new MX2 (photo by Jim Froneberger). Above: MXR Technologies CEO, Chris Meyer (left) and Paul Lopez in front of Gary Ward's MX2 (photo by Jim Froneberger).

wondering what we were up to. Gary and Freddie have flown formation in the past, so after the exchange of a few words, we caught up to Freddie's Pitts and proceeded to do three barrel rolls around him, indicating about 120 knots. It was an unexpected, beautiful thing to see.

We split up, with Gary saying we were off to do a Lomcevak. Freddie took that as an invitation, and quickly tumbled the Pitts as we departed. Again, a beautiful sight.

Gary did some clearing turns, and then said we'd do a seatbelt check. He rolled it on its back, I didn't move much, and we were ready.

I've done a tumble or two, but this was quite extraordinary. If my memory serves me properly, I was thrown against the straps with nearly three negative Gs, and I counted the horizon go by three times. As Gary had predicted, the tumbles were very tight and very quick – nothing at all like what you see in a biplane or an aluminum monoplane. When we recovered, Gary said, "Well, that's probably the most violent thing we'll do today." Maybe. Maybe not.

Gary can orchestrate a mini airshow act on the fly (pun intended). Having already flown with Paul, I was a bit more at ease and capable of looking at the little things – such as how much stick it takes to recover from a hammerhead, or how much elevator it takes to pull five or six Gs. The hammerhead proved to be a mini-demonstration of mas-

sive control authority. In many airplanes, you learn to kick the left (U.S.) rudder at the top while adding forward, right stick. In (for example) a Decathlon, you might easily be near the control stops for all three axes. I watched the rudder pedals and the stick as we came over the top. Each moved maybe an inch or two in any direction. If I hadn't seen the airplane swap directions, I would not have guessed Gary was using enough control input to do much more than correct for a slight gust.

So if it takes only an inch or two of pull to go vertical or do a loop, imagine the aerodynamic effect when you slam the stick into a corner to start a tumble.

For the rest of our ride, Gary continued to improvise, showing me a noisy, buffeting flat spin, more vertical maneuvers, and that strange-looking climb whereby the airplane is aimed straight up, but tracking 30-degrees off vertical.

No doubt, designer Chris Meyer, has come up with a winner with the MX2, and Gary is one of the first few airshow pilots to see the light (Greg Poe is another, of course). Expect even more-impressive performance when the MXS (single-place) arrives. Unfortunately, I probably won't get a ride in one of those unless my long-lost, old, filthy-rich uncle reads this. Uncle Vito, are you there?