

Everything you need to know about... Aero GP

What's the deal?

Aero GP can reasonably claim to be the world's most extreme motor sport. Eight planes race at 300mph just 10 metres above the ground, then use virtual weapons to destroy each other (*Top Gun*-style), and finally round off with an assault course that includes bombing targets. The first race took place in 2005; now a TV audience in over 100 countries is threatening to take **Aero GP** mainstream.

Who are the heroes?

Fighter pilots, aerobatics champions, captains of commercial 747s and, to a

man, uncompromising adrenaline junkies. Two stand out. Richard "Smokey" Young started off in the US Air Force and also flew Boeing jets. Ruddy-cheeked Gerald Cooper, the pin-up of the competition and youngest star at 30, owns Wickenby airfield in Lincolnshire.

Could they take Lewis Hamilton?

Formula One cars only get up to about 180mph. Hamilton only ever feels 5½G; **Aero GP** pilots experience 10G as they twist and turn; they lose colour vision, and peripheral vision, as blood drains from their brains.

What about the hardware?

Most of the planes were designed for air shows in the 1980s. They can all climb 1,000 metres per minute, reach 330mph, roll 345 degrees per second and take off from a 125-metre runway.

How dangerous is it?

In Malta in 2006, two pilots collided. One survived; the other died instantly.

How can I watch it?

The next race is in Abu Dhabi on 29 January. Sky Sports carries highlights, and live coverage is at www.airsports.tv

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