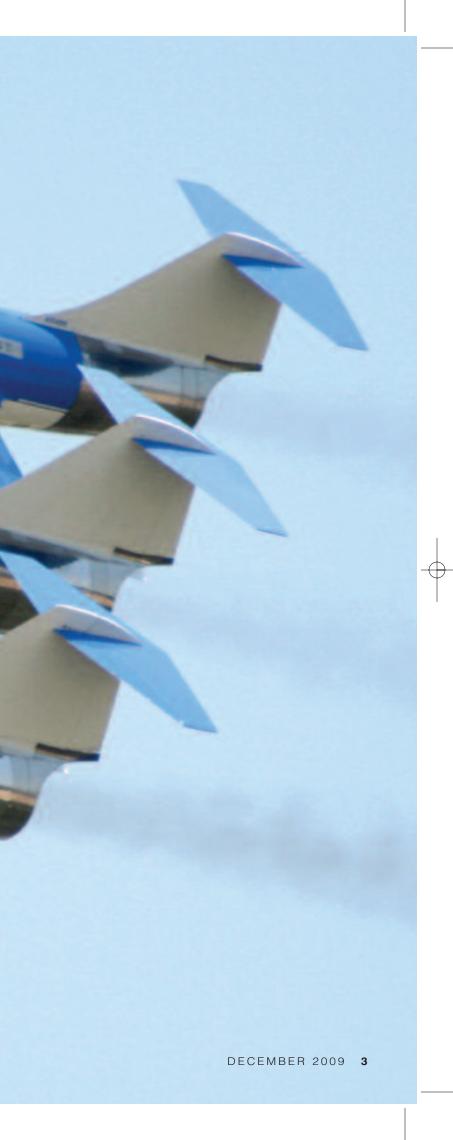# GALLERY Starfighters' F-104 Demo Team

By Steve Pace | Photos by xxxxxxxxxxx

One two-seat Lockheed-built CF-104D - 104632 (N104RB); ex-Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Two single-seat Canadair-built CF-104s - 104759 and 104850 (N104RN and N104RD); ex-RCAF. Pilots: Rick Svetkoff (president/lead pilot), Steve Ritchie (right wing), Mike Smith (left wing), Geoff Hickman (demo pilot)

MILITARY DEMONSTRATION TEAMS such as the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds and the U.S. Navy Blue Angels are nothing new at airshows, but a civilian demonstration team flying former first-line military aircraft certainly is. The Starfighters F-104 Demo Team of Tampa Bay, Florida, flies a trio of former Royal Canadian Air Force Lockheed and Canadair F-104 Starfighters throughout the air show season (usually beginning in March and ending in November). These include one two-seat Lockheed-built CF-104D (N104RB) and two Canadair-built single-seat CF-104s (N104RD and N104N), each one powered by a single General Electric J79-GE-11 axial-flow turbo-jet engine that develops 17,500 pounds thrust in afterburner and can propel them to speeds in excess of Mach number 2, or 1,480mph in level-attitude flight. In fact, the F-104 was the world's first operational fighter plane capable of such speed.
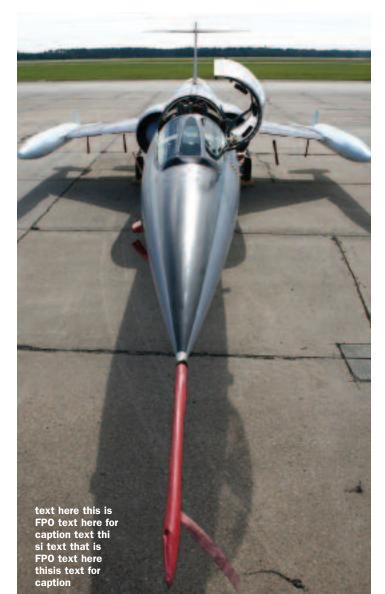
The Starfighters team was established in 1995, and it maintains working relationships with the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, NASA and test pilot schools across America. Former U.S. Navy A-4 pilot Rick "Comrade" Svenkoff is president and lead pilot of this popular demonstration team. Former U.S. Navy F-14 pilot Mike "Smitty" Smith flies left wing, and former U.S. Air Force F-4 driver Steve Ritchie flies right wing. Geoff "Hak" Hickman, a former USAF F-16 demonstration pilot, is the demonstration pilot for this unique team. Ritchie, with 339 combat missions in 800 combat hours in the Vietnam War, is the only ace of that conflict with five MiG-21 kills.

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