

Airshow Camera Settings Cheat Sheet

Quick reference for sharp aircraft photos. Keep it on your phone for the flight line.

Shutter speed: choose for the subject

Subject	Shutter speed	Result
Fast jets (freeze)	1/1000 to 1/2000 sec	Crisp through fast passes
Jets with motion	1/500 to 1/640 sec	Sense of speed when panning
Propellers and warbirds	1/125 to 1/250 sec	Blurred prop disc, looks alive
Helicopters	1/125 sec or slower	Blurred rotor disc
Display teams / formations	1/1000 sec or faster	Every aircraft sharp

Autofocus

- **Mode:** Continuous (AF-C / AI Servo) for everything flying.
- **Area:** small zone or expanded point on clean sky; single point on cluttered backgrounds.
- **Aircraft detection:** on for a solo aircraft against clean sky; off or override against clutter.
- **Tracking sensitivity:** set towards locked-on / hold the subject.
- **Back-button focus:** move focus to the rear button so the shutter only fires.

Exposure and shutter type

- **Aperture:** f/5.6 to f/8 (open up in low light).
- **ISO:** as low as the light allows, or Auto ISO with a sensible cap.
- **Always shoot raw** for latitude in harsh, changing light.
- **Ground-to-air / bright sky:** add +1 to +2 stops exposure compensation so the aircraft is not a silhouette.
- **Shutter type:** use the mechanical or electronic first curtain shutter for props and helicopters to avoid a bent propeller.

Golden rules: Freeze jets, blur props (a frozen propeller looks wrong). Pan smoothly from the waist and follow through after the shutter. Fire short bursts at the peak of the maneuver, not all the way through.