

THE VANCOUVER SUN

TV tonight: Ice Pilots NWT

By Alex Strachan, Postmedia News October 12, 2011



Ice Pilots NWT airs on History TV Wednesday at 8 p.m. ET/PT.

Photograph by: Handout, History

The land of the midnight sun can be a funky place to fly, especially when, as one veteran mechanic grouses in the new season of the high-flying docu-reality series Ice Pilots NWT, "We're dealing with (colourful adjective) worn out junk."

"Antique airplanes, antique fuel," Buffalo Airways' irrepresible, 28-year-old general manager Mikey McBryan says. He would rather that the air-freight company that services some of Canada's most remote, far-flung communities above the Arctic Circle be tricked out with shiny new gadgets. Mikey McBryan knows about shiny gadgets: He's addicted to his new iPhone. The grizzled old veteran who jump-started the business, "Buffalo" Joe McBryan, has a healthy disdain for style over substance, though.

"It's my business," Buffalo Joe growls at the camera, channelling his inner Lee Marvin. "The family just work for the business."

And so, in the third-season opener of one of Canadian TV's most surprising success stories -- Ice Pilots NWT is the Ice Road Truckers of homegrown History TV -- Buffalo Joe hires an outside gun, a pointy-head named Duane Hicks, to whip his girlie-men staff into shape. That prissy little iPhone ain't gonna cut much ice when it's 50 below and the fuel's runnin' low a mile over Hay River.

"When it comes to my father," a chastened Mikey McBryan says, "it's never really discussion. It's really . . . orders."

By now, fans of Ice Pilots NWT know what to expect: Hard-working, blue-collar daredevils flying battered planes through some of the most challenging flying conditions on the planet. The twin-prop DC-3s look barely air-worthy, let alone capable of fighting a hellacious headwind, but

remote, far-flung Northern communities like Kugluktuk, 600 kilometres north of Yellowknife, and Taloyoak -- a mere 900 kilometres to the east -- rely on Buffalo Airlines' beaters for their lifeline.

Ice Pilots NWT is enjoyable to watch -- in the warmth and comfort of the family home, a cup of steaming grog in hand. It's about real people doing real jobs, jobs that matter. Ice Pilots NWT is cut from the same cloth as Deadliest Catch, in which manly men and strong women test themselves against the elements, and Ice Pilots appeals to a similar audience.

This ain't about winning a recording contract with Sony Music, or landing a photo spread in Vogue Italia. The language is more salty, the workplace more unforgiving. When the weather gets really hairy up there, real lives are at stake. The action on the ground can get a bit grungy at times, but when it takes to the air, Ice Pilots NWT soars.

(History TV, Wednesday 8 p.m. ET/PT)

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