

Vignettes from Oshkosh 2023



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By Mike Jones

Cessna Pilots Magazine, originally published: October 2023

Oshkosh 2023 has come and gone a month now, but I'm still basking in the sweaty glow of the memories. I want to light a cigarette, blow smoke at the ceiling, and ask if it was good for you, too? This was my eleventh Oshkosh, and it was as good as the first. Astoundingly, every time it's different.

No Play-By-Play

My colleagues at this magazine and others have diligently recorded chronologies of the airshows, the forums, the exhibits, the innovations, even the weather, for your review. The photo montage in EAA's Sport Aviation magazine is exhaustive. To broadly recapitulate all of that excellent reporting—with the only difference being the view from my campsite—would be tedious. A better frame of reference, I think, is to dive-deep into just a few moments of the affair.

As such, I offer you a series of vignettes. These are not the best-known events, like when the U-2 spy plane gave us an unannounced airshow. Nor are these memories the most crowded, like when a thousand women in blue T-shirts celebrated under a huge Boeing Dreamlifter. These are not even the noisiest or the most photogenic. But I want to throw a spotlight on the hundreds of small moments that demonstrate the skills, the ingenuity, the shared community, the playfulness, and the energy of the people of AirVenture. It's why we keep coming back.



Care-free Camping in the Rain

To the best of my knowledge, ATC allows the steady flow of general aviation aircraft streaming down the busy FISK arrival into Oshkosh to be interrupted by only five very special groups: the five “mass arrivals.” There’s the Mooney clan with all their tails bolted on backwards, followed by the snooty Bonanza family. There’s a large Piper tribe, of course, always a bit scruffy. Then the Cirrus gaggle shows up like the board of directors, all parachutes and fiberglass. One of the biggest mass arrivals is the Cessna team.

Each of these aircraft families camps together incestuously, in segregated sites strewn down the south side of the east-west runway. It has been my joy for the past seven or eight years to pitch my tent at the Cessna Base Camp, and this was the fifteenth year for the Cessna mass fly-in. About a hundred Cessnas of all sizes and shapes occupied our grassy ramp. Located at the far western end of the North Forty, it is adjacent to the over-run for Runway 27.

The Cessna camp has a number of attributes that make it the premier airplane camping locale at all of Oshkosh.

First, it is close to the bathhouse, which is convenient for those with an aversion to porta-potties. It also is on high ground, so rainwater briskly trickles downhill toward the unfortunates eastward. It is conveniently located near the

gate to off-airport destinations such as Target, Walmart, and — my perennial favorite — Los Tres Amigos Mexican restaurant (photo, right). Order the frozen margaritas with salt.



The Cessna base camp is a command post, but it's all about fun, flying, food, and family. Our headquarters is a large circus tent equipped with grills, generators, charging stations, and coffee pots, plus dozens of tables and folding chairs.

Every morning starts with an enormous breakfast cooked by volunteer campers, and every meal is unique. Without fuss or structure, campers pitch in and do a little bit of what is needed to be done. Eggs are scrambled, bacon is sizzled, coffee is brewed; everybody works but nobody is in charge. Moms



entertain the smallest children, who are abundant. Grouchy greybeards watch the coffee perk

The Cessna Base Camp is, without a doubt, the most pleasant and convivial camping location in all of AirVenture. This year more than 100 Cessna owners, pilots and passengers circled the wagons for breakfasts, dinners, and conversation. Every day volunteers would race out to Walmart and pick up supplies for the next day. It's amazing that no breakfast menu is ever duplicated in the same week. Here's a snap of Nick helping with the sausages one morning. When not eating at the campsite, there are parties, vendor events, or restaurants which are more than eager to welcome hungry campers. Eight Cessna campers enjoyed a dinner at Los Tres Amigos restaurant, which has the shortest lines and the feistiest barmaids of any bistro at Oshkosh. The big tent is also a safe harbor when the Oshkosh summer thunderstorms roll in; this year the Wednesday storm happened during breakfast and everybody hunkered down and enjoyed their meal while Mother Nature tried her worst.

while teenagers flirt and fluster. When everybody is fed, the team organically reassembles to clean and sanitize.

The coffee stays hot all day and there are coolers with water and sodas for the thirsty.

Each meal is funded through donations, and each morning's fundraising pays for the groceries for the following day. I participated in the grocery shopping on Sunday.



We filled three shopping carts with about \$700 worth of supplies—paper plates, thirty dozen eggs, bottles of cooking oil, stacks of fruit and endless beverages. It's a feast.

The Cessna camp also hosts a marvelous communal banquet on Sunday night. In the fading sunlight, everybody dons our "Cessnas to Oshkosh" shirts (white this year) and we pose for one massive photo. The dinner is

catered by the remarkable chefs of La Sure's Banquets. They actually bring in staff out of retirement just for this spectacularly fun event. (Special note to Oshkosh newbies: for decades, La Sure's breakfast restaurant just outside the North Forty campground was the pre-eminent eatery at Oshkosh; we still mourn its closing.) Rodney Swanson, chief organizer of the Cessnas-to-Oshkosh mass fly-in, offered an inspiring speech about the importance of GA flying and honored the many sponsors whose contributions helped fund the Base Camp.

When the show finally opens on Monday, the huge white tent becomes the communal home for all the Cessna family. Our days usually start and end sitting outside the tent, watching the stream of arrivals on downwind. During the hottest part of the day, when feet are hurting and back-packs are heavy, it's also a fine place to retreat.

From Base Camp, you can watch the airshow in un-crowded splendor. To be sure, you can't hear the saccharine commentary gushing over the flightline speaker system but even the nearsighted can spot an F-22 just fine. Plus, the setting is perfect: you're in the shade of a Cessna, chatting with friends, near a bathroom, with a beer in your hand. I watched the Wednesday twilight airshow from the campground and marveled at the skill demonstrated by tight formations in the dimmest of light.



The conviviality of the base camp tent is most appreciated when the weather turns sour. The circus tent is a robust structure, stabilized with pegs driven four feet deep into terra Oshkosh. Christmas lights encircle its interior and give the tent a warm glow. We collectively endured five thunderstorms from Friday to Thursday. It doesn't take too much rain for our individual sleeping tents to become claustrophobic.

On Wednesday, the morning of the worst storm, all hundred or so campers clustered under its eaves, sharing chairs, charging phones and sipping fresh coffee as the nimbus fruitlessly wrung itself out. One big plus: all AirVenture campgrounds have reasonably good WIFI service, so we were able to follow the storm on radar and email our families without even getting our feet wet.

Walking the FISK Arrival

The FISK arrival is the Super Bowl of general aviation flying. NOTAM in hand, the well-prepared pilot approaches the initial fix of Green Lake with eyes outside the cockpit. Most co-pilots are in a panic, glued to Foreflight showing all the other traffic converging over that forlorn patch of Wisconsin farmland. Then it's a gentle turn to RIPON at 1,800 feet, 90 knots, half-mile in trail. Follow the railroad tracks to FISK and listen to the radio for further instructions. If all goes well, you get a green light to Oshkosh. If somebody screws up, you may be ignominiously dispatched back to Green Lake. So much to do, so much can go wrong. It's simply thrilling.

But I wondered about those controllers at FISK: who are those grouchy little goblins? What do they do? What NASA-like equipment must they deploy to keep so many planes organized? I decided to find out, and wrangled a ride to the scene. I also wondered why the town of Fisk doesn't have an "e" in its name, like the waypoint.

Neither FISKE nor Fisk were anything like my imagination.



Amusingly, somebody dropped a pin labeled “FISK VFR Approach Control” on to Google Maps, even though it, Brigadoon-like, only materializes one week every July before returning to somnolescent agriculture. I’m guessing some farmer begrudgingly shared a half-acre of hilltop to be used for the FAA, probably in return for a thank-you donation from the EAA. Plush it is not. The whole operation is housed in a small white construction trailer on the top of a hill, surrounded by farms. Toilets? Nope. Running water? Nada. Mosquitos? Them we got.

But don’t go looking for the dazzling urban delights of Fisk; that would be shooting a little bit high. There’s a Fisk Avenue, which intersects with Utica Avenue (which should be in New York). There isn’t a town, a church, or volunteer fire department carrying the Fisk name. Mostly it’s just corn and soybeans. Miles and miles of both. Google reports laconically Fisk “is an unincorporated community located in the town of Utica, Wisconsin.” Times Square it’s not.

All that said, the FISK operation is remarkable. At its heart is a small cluster of volunteers who are certified ATC controllers. They donate their



vacation time to come to Oshkosh and work in the field (literally) for a week. They can be identified at long distances by their cheery pink T-shirts.

The voice pilots hear on the radio is NOT the voice of the controller, it's just the talker. The real decision-making is in the hands of two binocular-equipped controllers who spot and call out arriving traffic by make, model and sometimes color. Sometimes speaking simultaneously, the controllers issue terse callouts to the talker who sequentially relays the messages to the individual airplanes.

Once spotted, each arrival is asked to “rock your wings” to ensure the correct plane is responding. If everything works properly, the controllers will direct each plane to a runway, usually alternating between the east/west runway and the north/south runway. Everybody is super-busy but polite and professional. Most transmissions end with a cordial, “Welcome to Oshkosh!”

But lots can go wrong.

Sometimes planes follow one another too closely. When they get “the rock” they are turned left (to the north) and sent back to the purgatory of the Green Lake hold to try again. The controllers really do mean 90 knots, 1800 feet, half-mile in trail. *Really.*



Sometimes planes arrive as a flight, which seems to be a pernicious behavior of Bonanzas and homebuilt RVs. This requires extra conversation and coordination to make sure the arriving runway (usually 36R and 36L for flights) can handle the load.

Some planes arrive on a route they dreamed up all their own, usually with the help of their “direct-to-KOSH” GPS. The NOTAM’s instructions are to “follow the railroad tracks” because those railroad tracks bring the planes right to the bottom of the hill upon which the controllers are sitting. If you go GPS-direct to Runway 27, you’ll be a good half-mile north of the hilltop, cutting the corner in front of somebody who was following the rules. Get ready to see Green Lake again. Hope you have lots of fuel.

Sometimes planes just arrive, as if nothing special is going on that week. They don’t have the NOTAM and they haven’t done a scintilla of flight prep. Unwittingly, those pilots have confessed all their sins. There is no place for them to hide. Blood pressure soaring, the controllers send those guys packing, without apology.

Another problem arises when things get backed up at the airport. Perhaps a flight of warbirds is arriving, or somebody blew a tire on landing. There is a fourth controller in the white trailer who is on the phone with OSH Tower. When Tower advises there are runway problems, the hilltop team at FISK devises a recovery plan, which usually starts by putting planes into a hold around Green Lake. It can get really exciting really quickly.

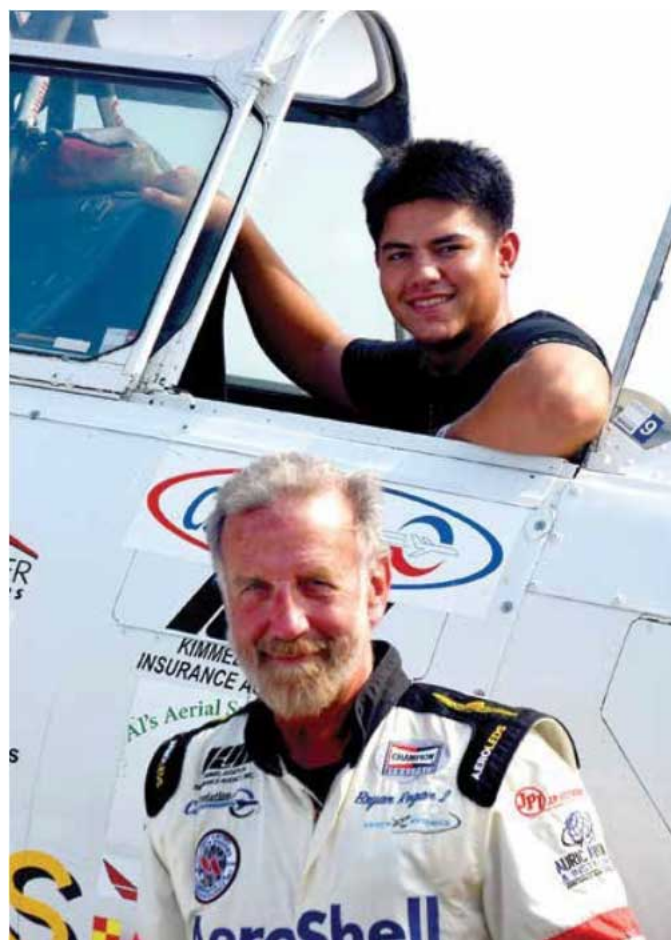
Oshkosh tourists, such as myself, cluster on the hillside. Everybody generally leaves the controllers alone; they’re busy enough without distractions. But we listen to the radio calls, watch the wings rock, and cheer as interesting planes and their crews deliver precision performances.

“Good rock!”

Nick Soars with Aeroshell

In last month's edition of this newspaper, readers will recall my young co-pilot Nick Phan, an enthusiastic proto-pilot who rode right seat with me in the Centurion. Nick is a great traveling companion, a fine camper, and an enthusiastic participant in Base Camp activities. Just one example of his energy: on Sunday, Nick was up at 4:30am, jogged to the Planet Fitness gym a couple of miles off-site for a workout, jogged back, and joined the team making breakfast in the big tent. All while I was still sawing logs.

But I had a surprise for Nick that had been percolating for several weeks. Networking through friends of friends, I had snagged for him a morning ride with the Aeroshell team.



The morning started smoky, like New Jersey on a good day, with haze from the Canadian forest fires a thousand miles to the west settling heavily over Oshkosh. Getting Nick to the flight line for his 7:30 departure was an adventure in itself: a school bus to the “North Forty” gate, a delay as Security checked everybody’s backpacks, a John Deere tram to the airport’s control tower, followed by a twenty-minute sprint to the flight line. Arriving on time, we breathlessly introduced ourselves and were invited under the rope, into the sacred “air side” of the airshow venue.

How exciting to actually touch the airshow planes! The Aeroshell team uses the North American AT-6 “Texan.” The first Texan flew in 1938 and was the principal training plane for all U.S. Army pilots in World War II who were slotted for fighter aircraft such as the P-51. Up close you can see what a beast the plane is. She's 30 feet long with 42 feet of wings and weighs a sprightly 5,600 pounds. Powering this hunk of steel and aluminum is the extraordinary nine-cylinder Pratt & Whitney Wasp radial displacing 1,344 cubic inches (22 liters, for our metric friends) and whacking out 550 noisy horsepower. With that modest power-to-weight ratio and no streamlining, you wouldn't think this would be a great aerobatic plane. But you'd be wrong.

The Aeroshell team is, to my mind, the preeminent aerobatic team on the airshow circuit today. Their resumés are legendary. Flight lead Mark Henley has flown over 150 aircraft types, is a Designated Pilot Examiner, and has an A&P ticket just for fun. Steve Gustafson holds a bushel of instructor ratings and has been a certified aerial applicator (crop duster) for 30 years. Flying the “slot” or fourth position, Jimmy Fordham just re-tired from Delta with over 22,000 hours and over 100 aircraft types in his logbook. Meanwhile, Bryan Regan came



to the team in 2008 with 7,500 total hours, including aerobatics with the Red Baron Pizza Squadron in 450 hp Stearman biplanes.

Nick was assigned to fly with Regan, which pleased me because I actually had met Regan and his T-6 two years before while we both were refueling in Springfield, Illinois. He impressed me then as a quiet and competent fellow who let his flying skills speak more loudly than any words.

Nick was strapped into the backseat of Bryan's plane and got a safety briefing on the use of the parachute.

"I was surprised because all the flight controls had been removed," he said to me later. "That made the cockpit very spacious. I could still see some antique gauges such as an altimeter, airspeed, and the heading indicator."

As the gaggle readied for their engine-start routine, the unexpected happened. Twice.

First, a taildragger on Runway 36R managed to ground-loop itself into the trees. Taildraggers are notorious for ground-looping, but usually during landings or fighting unfriendly winds. This plane was departing and the winds were dead-calm, so it was extremely odd. The fire engines raced to the scene, the airport closed, and all flying was delayed.

While they waited, Nick finally got Regan talking. "I asked him if he was a golfer. Bryan lived in Arizona for a while and is an avid golfer. So we mostly talked about golf while we waited."

After an hour the runway reopened, to the great relief of everybody. At least two dozen other planes had already taxied to the end of Runway 36 and were eager to get into the sky. The team started their engines and took their place in line. But Tower put everything on hold, pending the arrival of a Delta Airlines Airbus 350 that didn't want any competition for the skies. Tower had

frozen the airspace while the Airbus was still 60 miles out. Even Air Force One doesn't get sixty miles of dead air! The plane flew a leisurely pattern in the murk while dozens of planes waited, time wasting, cylinders heating, tempers fuming.

Eventually the Aeroshell team departed as two flights of two, and they turned to the west and practiced their maneuvers.

"The noise of the T-6 is a lot different than the C-172 I am training in," Nick said, "and the plane had a lot more power."

The Aeroshell team uses this horsepower with surgical skill. "The precision of the maneuvers they performed was incredible," Nick related. "As we performed 360° loops, I felt weightless at the top and about 4 Gs at the bottom, all while being a in a tight formation of four planes. Every maneuver was perfect. Nobody moved out of position or even wiggled. Just amazing. Alongside the incredible flying, Nick took a moment to notice that the views over Lake Winnebago were spectacular. He was also amazed to look down on the South Forty campground, literally seeing thousands of planes parked side by side.

As we walked back to reality, Nick relived the flight with me and set a new personal goal.

"I'm going to get my taildragger ticket," he told me exuberantly, "and I'm going to Alaska to be a bush pilot!"

New Tech Spotlighted at the AOPA Tent

The quantity of innovation at Oshkosh is eye-watering. There was a slew of new airplanes, so beautiful but so unaffordable. Most drool-inducing were the new avionics—colorful, capable, easy to use, smarter than tomorrow, and just the right size to replace the LORAN in my avionics stack. These showcase systems made my panel look like a soggy newspaper.

Wandering into the AOPA tent, I was surprised to find a new twist on an old technology: a flight simulator. There's nothing unique about flight simulators; I flew the DOS version of "Flight Simulator" in 1989. My instrument ticket was punched on a mechanical simulator whose yoke was linked to gauges with bicycle chains. I've used a modern Redbird full motion simulator and it's impressive. But until AirVenture, never before had I seen simulators using virtual reality (VR) headsets.



Ray Bedard is a twenty-year Canadian pilot and a twenty-year software coder, which makes him the perfect guy to develop our industry's next-generation of flight simulators. Behind him you can see the normal flat-panel displays of traditional simulators, but the visual effect of putting on the virtual reality headset makes the experience immersive, compelling and an outstanding training environment.

True Course Simulations of Prescott, AZ came to Oshkosh to demonstrate the power of VR in the flight training environment. Their system features a VR headset linked to a comfortable seat, a yoke, rudder pedals, and a simplified panel with flaps, throttle and switches. I spoke with Ken Watts from True Course about their plans. He

feels, and I agree, that the cockpit is a terrible learning environment. It's noisy, it's unfamiliar, it's expen-

"We've worked for years developing our courseware," Watts told me. "Whatever topic a pilot needs to learn, they fly it first in our simulator and get proficient, before they get into the actual airplane. Master it first here, then start in the airplane."

With the advent of VR computing technology, True Course now links their software to their proprietary simulator which they call the “Immersive Training Device.” This is cutting-edge VR and offers flight schools and even at-home enthusiasts to experience immersive virtual reality flight training at an affordable cost.

True Course’s secret sauce is Ray Bedard, a computer geek with 20 years of flight experience in the Canadian Air Force and 20 years at a university-class flight school. He knows how pilots learn.

“I wanted my students to have a better learning environment than sitting in a noisy, bumpy cockpit,” Bedard explained. “I created computer simulations and used them in the classroom and my students loved them. But it was 120 hours of writing code to prep for one hour of their learning in the simulator.”

Bedard’s productivity has improved over the years. True Course now uses SimDirector (a Lockheed Martin soft-ware product) to create the simulations. There are more than seventy scenarios in their private pilot library, including crosswind takeoffs and landings, turns around a point, night landings, and pattern work.

“We can take them all the way to their private pilot check ride,” Bedard said proudly. “It’s a building-block approach.”

Introducing a 3D headset in the virtual reality simulator is “a totally different ballgame,” he said, and because it is such an upgrade to the learning environment Bedard “won’t do 2D coding anymore.”

“I’ve built a couple of more advanced scenarios, like you’re flying in Alaska and have an emergency,” Bedard showed me. “So how do you handle that? What do you do first? You practice your checklists, and I pause the simulation to discuss things. Eventually we run through the emergency and we don’t pause it and we see how you do.” That makes for a great learning environment.

Bedard let me take the VR simulator for a test drive. Working the simulator were Paige Cody, a software expert, and Cannon Smith, who's working on his commercial rating. I sat in the simulator's comfortable cockpit and experimented with the controls as they reset the system. First, I "flew" using the large flat panel display mounted on the wall (see photo); that was straightforward. I zoomed with ease over the Grand Canyon in a simulated C-172. No big deal.

Then we paused to fit the VR headset in place. It took several adjustments to get it properly positioned, but once in place it was comfortable and relatively light.

With the VR headset clamped over my eyes, my entire frame of reference changed. Suddenly everything I could see out the windscreen of the synthetic airplane moved as my head moved. If I turned



Cannon and Paige help a youngster position the headset and re-set the simulator for his flight.

to look to the side, the display looked out the side. The resolution was remarkable and sharp. Every control input was instant reflected in the visual display. I found myself twisting my shoulders and leaning into banks and turns. It was exhilarating.

As I turned my head back and forth, the majesty of the Grand Canyon swept across my eyes from east to west. If I moved my head too briskly the image would pixelate, but normal movements were easily accommodated. I

made a few turns and headed to the Page, AZ airport, where I promptly screwed the pooch with the landing.

After my brief experience, I'd guess the impact of teaching in a completely immersive environment is probably 150% more effective than a traditional simulator and 1000% more effective than an actual airplane. This is a big deal.

I noticed two minor problems with the VR simulator. First, the simulation did not display the inside of the aircraft cabin, so I couldn't check the circuit breakers, for example. Second, I couldn't see my hands on the panel. When I tried to deploy the flaps or adjust the throttle I couldn't see what I was touching. Bedard was way ahead of me on that, too.

"That's the next step for us. It's what's called mixed reality, to see your hands on the knobs and the yoke as you fly the simulator," he explained. "It's harder but we'll get there soon."

VR flight training sounds like a "win-win" for every-body: better and more efficient learning, at the lowest possible cost.

A Day at the Museum

The savvy camper at Oshkosh carries a little bit of everything because anything can happen. In my plane, I carry spare tent pegs and extra rope for my tent and, sure enough, after Saturday's storms one of my tent's lines had snapped in the high winds and I was able to replace it without fuss. Snacks and water are never wasted while a back-up pair of dry shoes can save your heels from blisters. In my backpack, an inexpensive poncho from Dick's Sporting Goods has kept me dry through many storms, this Oshkosh included. On Sunday, I was glad to have it.

Sunday's thunderstorm was stewing and brewing all morning, and by mid-afternoon the radar showed it to be a gullywasher. I didn't want to spend the afternoon either hunched in my tent or wandering the big exhibit hangars.

Instead, I risked a visit the aviation museum on Pioneer Field. As always, getting there was half the fun because Pioneer Field isn't really close to anything.

A sluggish school bus wearily drove me and a couple dozen other campers to the North Forty gate. Luckily a tram was waiting as I raced through Security. The John Deere tractor slowly trundled us past homebuilt camping as the sky darkened. The next leg needed legs: with a 30-pound backpack on my shoulders, I jogged past the huge central bus depot just as icy-cold raindrops started to bombard the dust, plopping fat craters in the sunbaked sand. An unnamed but much-appreciated lady in a golf cart noticed my predicament and scooped me up. She went far out of her way to drop me at the museum. She probably was soaked on her return because the deluge began in earnest as I jumped off her cart. No good deed goes unpunished, my father used to say.

The EAA Museum is an unexpected gem, far larger and more interesting than I had imagined. First, it's free and relatively uncrowded. There's a large gift shop staffed with smiling volunteers. There are classrooms and lab spaces. But most enticingly, there is a massive subterranean display of antique aircraft.

As I stopped at the top of the stairs to take it all in, a docent perched at my shoulder and asked if I had any questions. This youngish lady, who asked to not be identified, worked for an airline but volunteered at the museum simply because of her passion for aviation. She was extremely well-informed and highlighted details of the exhibits I would have missed without her astute guidance. She was a gem, and I sincerely regret being unable to introduce her to you, dear reader. I hope if she sees these words she knows her expertise, her enthusiasm and her smile were much appreciated and will be long-remembered.

Dominating the entrance to the museum is a life-size replica of the Wright Flyer, with Orville at the controls. Wings drooping like a B-52, it is amazing this wood and cotton machine ever lifted off the ground with less than a dozen horsepower. More stunningly, the brothers flew the plane flat on their

stomachs. They could control both roll and yaw by lying in a “hip cradle.” When they twisted their hips from side to side the cradle shifted, which pulled cables connected to the wingtips and rudder. Can we spell “ergonomics”?

Another question for historians: Why did pilots wear coats and ties to fly their experimental flivvers, but not wear seatbelts?



Wandering the Oshkosh museum, I met Tom Schaitel, his son-in-law, Paul Ralston, and Pau's son Jacob. They were wondering what the modern FAA would think of the safety of the original Wright Flyer, or of wing-walking as demonstrated by the mannequin in the display. Jacob pronounced the museum to be "really big and really cool, awesome."

The museum displays are far more than just a paean to the Wright brothers. All of the early famous inventors and aviators have innovations on display, and many of the aircraft are originals, not replicas. Many not-so-famous inventors (crack-pots?) also have their contributions honored. The early days of airplane racing are well-documented in the museum, as are the “barnstorming” days of the 1920s and 1930s.

Of course, there is the mandatory replica of the Spirit of St Louis hanging from the ceiling, and knowledgeable docents offered insights into its operation and Lindberg's amazing flight to Paris. I was pleased to see a portion of the museum devoted to Burt Rutan and SpaceShipOne. This included a very well-produced video that was synchronized with the gyrations of the actual

SpaceShipOne hanging from the ceiling. There were also flying automobiles, a Gee Bee racer, gyrocopters and dozens of other interesting tidbits of history.

I ran into Thomas Schaitel, his son-in-law, Paul Ralston, and his son Jacob, aged 10, as they pondered the display of a wing-walker on top of a giant radial-equipped antique. This was their first time to both Oshkosh and the museum and they were very surprised and impressed. Jacob pronounced the museum is “really big and really cool, awesome.”



The author's favorite airplane in the museum is the ungainly Sikorsky S38 seaplane, which was a high-performing machine in the 1930s. The plane was inspected by the extended family of (L-R) Autumn, Madeline (in the green shirt), wee Cailyn, their mom Elizabeth, and Luke, who are variously from the Michigan, Oklahoma and Virginia. "I want to go in it," said Luke. "I want to fly it," Elizabeth challenged. Once the downpour had stopped, I met a gang of bikers who had taken refuge in the museum during the storm. Proud of their Scandinavian heritage, they are (L-R) Elizabeth Ihlen, Oden, Soren, Kaleigh, and the youngest is Magnus, nicknamed Moose, aged seven. They are all from Trevor, Wisconsin and pronounced the museum, and AirVenture in general, "way cool."

My favorite aircraft in the entire museum is the spacious Sikorsky S-38 seaplane. First flown in 1928, it is a twin-engine ten-seat amphibious aircraft that could carry up to 10,000 pounds. It out-performed anything of its time, was adopted by the U.S. military, and was one of Pan American's earliest aircraft.

This particular S-38 is in the museum is because of the unlikely Wisconsin link to S.C. Johnson & Co., the world's largest maker of furniture wax and a

Wisconsin scion. In 1935, Herbert Johnson, then the company's president, flew an S-38 from Racine, WI to Brazil to find a more reliable source of wax from the carnauba palm tree. In 2008, the Johnson family had this replica built and flew the trip again before donating the plane to the museum. There's a marvelous video of the aircraft and that flight showing inside the aircraft, with the screen located at the pilot's seat. It's a thrilling glimpse into an earlier time.

About the Author

Mike Jones is a travel writer and a 4,000 hour commercial-rated pilot who enjoys camping next to his 1979 Cessna Centurion at airshows. In next month's magazine, look for his report on the return flight from Oshkosh and some other new technology he discovered at the show. He's always accessible at PilotMike2012@gmail.com.

