

Oshkosh - 2013

By Chris Hope, Master CFI

Every pilot that I have ever met has only one of two responses when the subject of Oshkosh comes up. "Wow, that was great, and it gets better every year!", or "One of these years I WILL make it to Oshkosh!". And have you noticed that no one, except the EAA in their written literature, refers to this gathering as "Airventure?" Every one else just calls it "Oshkosh", as if the city disappears for the rest of the year.

Wife and I returned this year, after a very long absence. Some things have not changed, others have (including, perhaps, us?) For those who fly in, the VFR arrival is still challenging but doable. First, we read the 15 page NOTAM. Then, we read it again. Then, we read it again with a highlighter.

Enroute, plan to arrive with lots of gas in case of holding and diverting. Listen to the ATIS. Find Ripon. Then follow the train tracks and the plane in front of you to the appropriate runway. Don't like talking on the radio? This procedure is for you. Just listen. Instructions come to you, such as "White high-wing aircraft, plan to land at the white dot and exit left. Wing rock please." And your response, if you think that means you – a vigorous wing rock to acknowledge.

"White dot?" "Exit left?" Oh yes, the runway is divided into thirds with large dots to designate touchdown area. There can be three aircraft landing simultaneously, one in the first third, one in the middle, and one on the last third. And then, as the aircraft slows down, just roll off onto the grass on either side and taxi to the camping parking area. WOW!

But as much fun and as exciting as the fly-in experience can be, camping with a real roof, walls, and bed and stove, and clothes for all weather trumps the small aircraft with a small tent and one change of underwear. So this year we left the plane at home and pulled the camper.

Camping at Camp Scholler is a different experience from camping by the plane, but there are a lot of similarities to airplane camping. Our friends Dean and Sharon saved us a spot, and guided us in from the main gate and helped us get set up. Dean flies a Piper Tri Pacer from his grass strip in eastern Kansas. And camped nearby were other Kansas pilots from Dean's neighborhood, as well as new friends – Don flies powered parachutes, Bob and Ralph fly more recent aircraft, and Jason, our new young friend from the Madison WI area, is working on his Sport License in a J-3 Cub. ("Some day I will probably need to fly a plane with a nose wheel, but this is so much fun for now.") So the biggest similarity between the two camping areas is that there are a lot of nice people with a lot of different flying experiences to share.

So Sunday night, with rain threatening and the thermometer drifting downward we get the pop-up "popped up", get some dinner on the table, uncork a bottle of wine and plan the next day with old friends and new.

Monday, "Oshkosh" is officially open, and we awaken to the sound of powered parachutes taking off just on the other side of the trees from us. Nice. Everyone has

different ideas for the day. Our experienced Oshkosh veteran Sharon, announces that this is the day to pick up free t-shirts, hats, dinner tickets and more from the various vendors. Dean wants to wander the vendor tents. I want to learn more about using the iPad for aviation. (There is an “app for that”. But there is a seminar for that as well.) And as we wander toward the flight line, we are officially welcomed.

Every morning the fine EAA folks publish a 56 page newspaper, listing the events of the day, as well as the highlights of the previous day and various other aviation news items. And on this, the first day, I count more than 60 seminars. Oops, that’s just the count for the morning. More to come in the afternoon. So out of all of the seminars, workshops and forum discussions, I find “Ipads in the cockpit”, a forum led by Steve Podradchik, CEO of Seattle Avionics.



It seems that Steve really does know what he is talking about, as he led the development team for the AOPA flyQ, Bendix/King’s Wingman, and the SkyPad Voyager programs. His talk is informative as he leads us through the capabilities and shortcomings of the iPad and other tablets, and then compares many of the various flight planning and navigation applications on the market today. Then, we get an easy-to-follow discussion of the various ways to obtain ADS-B and nex-rad weather info. A lot of practical info packed into one hour.

So, it is late morning, and time to just stroll by a few of the vendor tents. Headsets? We’ve got them all. Avionics? Check. Aircraft parts? Yup. It’s all here, and more. But after lunch, it is time to slather on more sunscreen and find a place to watch an air show. Oh, yes there is one of those. Every day. And two on Wednesday and Saturday when they throw in the night shows.



The show opens with a parachute demonstration and American flag presentation by the Misty Blues, an eight-woman parachute team whose members average about 2,000 jumps. And they just finish coming down when the AeroShell Aerobatic team comes roaring across the field and heads upward. Four red and white T-6 Texans that seem to be glued at the wingtip as they come in low and then head high for a bomb burst. But wait, there’s more.



As the day (and the week) unfolds, we get to see the first public flight of the Terrafugia, the car that spreads its wings and takes off. (Or maybe the plane that folds its wings and the motors from the airport to the garage.) We get to see Dusty, the star of Disney's *Planes*, the little crop duster with big aspirations. And how about the world's only privately owned and operated Harrier jet? Watching it fly over, come to a stop in mid-air, slowly pivot around, and then descend straight down to a landing - AWESOME (In a sense, the Harrier is old news

for me because it was at Oshkosh in 1987 that I first saw the plane fly. It was awesome then, and it still is.)

Other flying events that hard to find elsewhere – 28 Beechcraft T-34s in formation. The first public flight of the “finished product”, Honda jet. (The toughest question for Honda jet purchasers will be, “red, blue, yellow, or silver?” For the biz-jet buyer, that airplane is a tough act to follow. And it looks great doing it.) And of course all of those single and formation aircraft that soar and spin and roll and tumble and make us feel ill just watching. And Ashley Battles who doesn't fly the wing of her partner Greg Shelton; she walks the wing of his red white and blue Stearman.



And for those of us who have flown (or who have dreamed of flying) in a hang-glider because it is as close to personal flying as possible, why not crank it up a notch? Why not strap a wing on your back and slide a few jet engines under your arms? Sound crazy? Not to Yves “Jetman” Rossy, who made his first American public demonstration at Oshkosh this week doing just that.

Thinking about buying a used aircraft? Want to know more about it from a “not a salesperson?” Since I am currently interested in a Grumman Tiger, my solution was to sit in on a seminar presented by the American Yankee Association. I now know what they love about the plane and what they don't. And I know, from members of the Grumman “keep ‘em flying” team, what I and my mechanic need to really look for when buying a Tiger and in the inspections to follow.

While some of my fellow pilots might get a thrill of executing the perfect snap roll or outside loop, I get strong satisfaction when I am in the weather and put the airplane exactly on airspeed, altitude and heading, and jump through all of the hoops of the FAA instrument approach plate. Other people who have the same passion formed IMCClubs.org, and I enjoyed the time that I spent with them. I might find myself starting something new in my little corner of the flying world. Great seminar.

On another day, we wander to the museum and to Pioneer Field. The grass runway at Pioneer Field is busy all week with helicopters taking off and landing, providing lots of Oshkosh's their only view of all of the activity on the field. And the museum is full of memorable home-built aircraft. During our museum wanderings, Dick Rutan is explaining the nuance of "waste elimination" from the Voyager, the plane he and Jeana Yeager flew, non-stop, unrefueled, around the world in 1986. While in another part of the museum, a group of "women of a certain age" talk about what it was like to ferry all types of military aircraft to the various locations in during World War II. Because of the war, all available male pilots were either training or flying operational missions. So the WASPS, the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, delivered all of the aircraft from the factory to their bases all over the world.



As the week drifts on, one day smoothly blends into another. One morning is spent wandering around the warbirds area. Another is spent in the grass, watching all of the ultra-light activity. At some point we wandered around the vintage restorations and the home-builts. (Man, there are some talented, patient people out there.) And one afternoon, when we just needed to unwind, we visited the seaplane base. Life is always relaxed around seaplanes.

Finally, with bags full of freebies and notebooks full of ideas, it was time to "un-pop" the camper, hook up, and head back home. But this time we are saying, "Next year, Oshkosh for sure!"

See you there.

Don't just practice until you get right. Practice until you don't get it wrong

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