

# the Flight Stuff

Edwin Warner Model Aviators

Join us . . . Just for the fun of it!

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## Fun in the Sun

by Jim Hawkins

For six days in April, a wonderful airplane event happens in Lakeland, Florida: Sun 'n Fun. I have been several times with my son, Ed, and once with him and Frances, my wife. The three of us headed that way again for a couple of days. "Come Fly with Us" was the theme for this 31<sup>st</sup> Fly-In. Sun 'n Fun has always tried to have something for everyone interested in aviation. This year's slogan emphasized the inclusive nature of the event.

On this trip, Ed and I were more interested in the experimental planes than the other types, because he flies one and I am building one. We are trying to get as much information as possible about these planes. As we walked around, we quickly got involved in educating ourselves. Vendors were more than eager to be of help. We found accessory goodies from top-flight avionics to bargains at the Parts Mart. There were hundreds of FAA approved workshops and forums for a wide variety of interests.

Other than the experimentals, there were several categories of planes: antique (before September 1945), classic (September 1945 through 1955), contemporary (1956 through 1967), seaplanes, helicopters, lightplanes, ultralights, and homebuilts. Several countries were represented. There were a lot of warbirds. I got close enough to touch the wing of "Glacier Girl" (a WWII P-38 Lightning that was recovered from under 268 feet of Greenland ice and restored to flying condition) and the A-10 Warthog before security ran us back over the tape. We saw a lot of vintage aircraft that you only read about in history books, hear about, or see in old movies. One of my favorites, the huge PBV Catalina, was at the show.

Of special note, there was a fly-by of a P-51, P-38, P-47, F-80, F-86, and two F-16s. The F-16s were flying so slow to accommodate the Mustang and similar planes that it looked like they were hanging in the air as they went by. It was interesting to see all those different years of aviation flying together in formation.

There were a multitude of great air shows. The Navy's Blue Angels did their aerobatic performance. One of the shows was unusual because it took place at night. This event is the largest night air show in the world. One team flew with lights on and dropped all kinds of fireworks, making a wonderful display. Hot air balloons also played a part in the Saturday night air show. The festivities began with a "balloon glow" when balloons inflated with the glow of their burners. The only bad thing about this night show was the 25 to 30 mph wind in 35 to 40 degree weather. The wind chill made it feel like 20 degrees.

I saw a new kit which really stirred my interest. It was a single seat experimental/ultralight helicopter. The high quality fiberglass, composite constructed *Mosquito* is neat looking. It resembles an AH-1 Cobra but without the guns. She weighs slightly less than 300 pounds and can be hauled on a trailer or on the bed of a regular truck with the rotors folded. With tricycle gear configuration, it is considered to be in the experimental category. When it is float equipped, it qualifies as an ultralight. There have been several single seat copters available but this is the first one that is fully enclosed and qualifies as an ultralight (when pontoons are used). It is quite an engineering feat. I just might have to have one. . . .



Jim is sitting snugly inside a *Mosquito XE*, checking the controls.

An event that a lot of people miss, but something you should definitely put on your schedule during Sun 'n Fun, is the Seaplane Splash-In. It is located at Lake Parker, about six miles northeast of Lakeland Linder Regional Airport. The Splash-In is held for two days: one for homebuilts and ultralights, another for factory-built certificated seaplanes. On each day, the Splash-In starts with an aerial parade over Linder Airport. There's plenty to see at Lake Parker. The grapefruit drops on a large circular floating tube from above 200 feet were entertaining. Daily bus service is provided. Buses depart hourly to and from the lake on both days.



Ed is standing in front of a mid 1940's Republic RC-3 Seabee amphibian.

I talked to some of the guys who flew in. On the first couple of days the planes arrived, they came in so heavily that wave after wave of pilots landed their planes three abreast, simultaneously. Seconds behind them was another row. There was no room for error. It was one of the hairiest situations I could ever imagine a pilot getting into on purpose. This was extremely unusual. They say that Oshkosh is even worse. With so many coming in at once, a crash could result in a domino effect. Everything had to be timed just right. When they called in to the air traffic control tower, they would be asked what type of plane they had. The authorities would then try to group planes that could maintain the same speed. The slower ones were put together and likewise the faster ones.

Several aircraft displayed on the show grounds were in a newly created category: Light Sport Aircraft. This new type of plane has been a work in progress for a decade. For many years at Sun 'n Fun and Oshkosh the talk was that the ruling for the new craft was close. The FAA has begun the process of awarding airworthiness certificates to the first batch of aircraft designated as Light Sport Aircraft. By the time Oshkosh rolls around this summer, there will be a number of airplanes people can buy and fly. The LSAs are less complicated than other airplanes on the market and cost less. The sport pilot certificate requires just 20 hours of training, which further reduces the cost of getting into aviation.

A special part of "Come Fly with Us" was the opportunity to meet WWII veterans, talk with them, and hear their stories during programs at the Florida Air Museum and other places. Many were also at the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) tent, where members of the famed Tuskegee Airmen also gathered. This year is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII and several Sun 'n Fun programs honored its veterans.

Sun 'n Fun is something that fellow modelers should do if you ever get the chance. It's not as big as Oshkosh but you'll walk enough to think it is. It takes two to three days to see all the different types of planes and air shows. There were probably at least 20 acres of experimentals alone. How many aches and pains do you want anyway? It's also a lot closer than Oshkosh--a nice one-day drive. Furthermore, Lakeland isn't that far from Orlando. We're certainly planning to have more fun in the sun next year.

## What's Up

Last month's club meeting was very special. **Tommy Clayton** got to attend for the first time in several years. Also, it was a welcome sight to see **Bob Patterson**, who got a ride from **Doug Whiteaker**. Bob's injured back is recovering nicely and he's doing pretty well.

The May COMA was given to **Steve Johnson** for a spectacular hard "landing" with his *ECO 8* helicopter.

Think Nevada is too far to travel for air races? How about Mississippi? The Tunica Air Races and Air Show will be held from June 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup>. The Unlimited racing class will have almost the same planes and pilots as Reno. This is a great chance to see one of only two events of its kind in the world. The Website is <http://tunicaairraces.com/>. (Sorry for the late notice but your editor didn't learn about Tunica until after the last newsletter was published.)

There will be a unique event at the Music City Aviators field in Peeler Park on June 5<sup>th</sup>. It's a Fly-In to help Scott Harris offset travel expenses to compete at the World Jet Masters in Budapest, Hungary. His awesome new scale plane will be on display for everyone to see. Scott will be flying his *F-15* and the club will have some other special events. All funds raised will go directly to help with the trip. For more info, go to [www.musiccityaviators.net](http://www.musiccityaviators.net).

The next Second Tuesday Club Breakfast Meeting is June 14<sup>th</sup> at the Bellevue Shoney's, 8:30 a.m.