Jan. 25, 2018 - The Sebring, FL Light Sport Aviation Expo

Each January the nearby Sebring Regional Airport is host to ***The Light Sport Aircraft Exposition***. This is something that I have attended yearly since I first built my Highlander LSA back in 2007. It gives me the opportunity to see the latest developments taking place in this classification of aircraft as well as keeping up with the innovations that have been built into Just Aircraft Company's current line of Highlanders, the genesis of which dates back to well before my 2007 model. However their latest offering, the SuperStol XL, incorporates some very innovative ideas which allow the airplane to easily operate out of any clearing that nears the dimensions of a soccer field. With its extra 2 feet of length, a 180 HP engine, auto-deploy leading edge slats, drooping fowler flaps, large pneumatic shock absorbing landing gear struts, and an approach speed bordering on 25 MPH, I have seen the plane touchdown and come to a rest within its own length. It is truly something to behold and while I would never be inclined to utilize any of its amazing performance capabilities, there are many pilots out there who thrive on this type of adventuresome "extreme" flying.

In the past I have both flown and driven into the Sebring airport. This year, due to some very strong and gusty wind conditions, I elected to make the hour and a half drive for the one day that I had availability to attend. Wandering the flight line I came across many interesting exhibits, not all of them having to deal with Light Sport Aircraft. For example there was a display featuring the original **Batmobile** (actually a 1955 Lincoln Futura concept car) and the Bell Model 47 G **Batcopter**, both from the mid 1960's era TV show and the original **"Batman"** movie.

Another "different" exhibit was the DASH.org jet. The jet is owned by a crypto-currency company that sells a digital payment system, similar to Bitcoin, to make large and mostly international purchases and asset transfers. I could never fully understand this type of "money" but I guess that it is useful when one is trying to circumvent various countries restrictions on bringing in currency. I did a minimal amount of research on this company but never could find out what the jet (which looks military), actually is. The only thing that I could find is that a DASH coin at, one time, cost over $1,000 US dollars to purchase and it is, today, going for under $800 US. **???**

An interesting flying vehicle was the German Stemme S-12 motor glider. While not a LSA, by any stretch, it does travel in that same 130-140 MPH cruise speed range and it is powered by the same Rotex 914 turbocharged 115HP engine that a lot of LSA's utilize. And, like all LSA's, it only carries two people. However what makes it unique is that it has a useful travel range of almost 1,000 miles and can reach an altitude of over 30,000 feet (but requiring ATC positive control once attaining 18,000). Another couple of features which sets it apart from the average LSA is its 80+ feet of wingspan (almost 3 times that of my plane) and a $350,000 cost (over 4 times that of my Highlander). What the use of this VERY expensive airplane would be, I am not sure. It cannot be taxied, or even stored in your average "T" hanger without first folding back its wings.

One of my "favorite" airplanes is the Lockwood AirCam. Resembling a flying canoe it is a twin Rotex engined air-borne vehicle that can be equipped with either wheels or floats. The pilot sits out in front of everything and the visibility has to be fantastic. The cockpit is completely open except for the clear plastic air shield out in front. With a cruise speed of about 100 MPH and a stall of 40 MPH it is in the same range as my Highlander but looks like it would be a load of fun (until it rains). With the myriad of lakes that abound here in Florida it seems to be a natural. While the plane is in the $100,000 range, this does include the engines, instruments, floats or paint, which could easily double that amount. That would seem to make the dollars to fun ratio a fairly high one.

This year's Expo did not appear to have the number of airplanes or vendors as in past events and after about 2 or 3 hours I seemed to have covered most of the exhibits and displays. I was trying to decide as to what to do next when I came across the EAA's (Experimental Aircraft Association) Ford Tri-motor parked out on the ramp. I learned that it was on a tour of the US and was offering rides to help fund the various EAA chapters. Now I have taken rides in the Tri-motor on two previous occasions but this is something that I will probably never tire of. Much like a ride on Disney's Space Mountain, each journey is unique and different. I inquired and was told that they had one empty seat for the next flight, ready to go in about 20 minutes. I decided to spring for the $75 fare and was one of the 11 passengers that soon climbed aboard. On the next page are some of my photos.

The Tri-motor's rather small tail assembly and showing its corrugated aluminum skin structure

Me, standing in front of engine #3, a 450 HP Pratt & Whitney Wasp Junior 9 cylinder radial engine

Ready to climb aboard through the oval entrance door. This particular plane had 5 rows of two seats each... all with window views.

The cockpit is roomy but simple. Interestingly only one tach and set of engine instruments are on the panel. The others are mounted just above their respective engines.

A selfie taken of me in Seat #2, located right behind the "co-pilots" position in the cockpit (and actually currently being occupied by just another passenger).

My view was of the #3 engine; but since we were flying @ 1,000 feet and 90 MPH, the same as in my own airplane, I had seen the ground from this level thousands of times.