

January 22, 2011 - Sebring Florida's LSA Expo

For me, at least, the flying season begins each year with EAA's Light Sport Aircraft Expo, held every January in Sebring, Florida (home of the 12 hour automotive endurance race). In the past I have been able to fly my own Just Aircraft Highlander the 100 or so miles from my fiancée's home in West Palm Beach over to the Sebring airport, to be joined later by Miriam and her dogs. This year my airplane was still up at the Just Aircraft factory in South Carolina foothills and I was down in Florida for the entire winter season on an "experiment", of sorts. For the past two dozen years Miriam and I have gotten together several times every year for visits or vacation trips lasting from 3 days to 3 weeks. We would then head back to our jobs and our separate lives until the next visit. Now that I am fully retired and have much more time for play, we decided to see if our relationship would stand the test of time...meaning more than just a few days of being together. So, in November I moved down to her 4th floor condo overlooking downtown WPB, and view of a golf course with a pretty lagoon. As of the Sebring Expo weekend I am into my 3rd month and we haven't killed each other, so I guess that it is working out. Anyway, I have not yet brought my plane down and hope to do so sometime in March to enjoy at least a couple months of Florida's great winter flying weather.

This meant that I had only my car to do the 2 1/2 hour drive over to Sebring, where we would stay at the historic 1916 built Kenelworth Lodge overlooking beautiful Lake Jackson. As is typical with Florida in January, there are wide swings in temperatures and weather patterns. When we arrived on Friday, it was warm and partly cloudy, and temperatures were in the low 70's. On Sunday, we awoke to temperatures in the low 30's along with brisk winds due to a frontal passage. I was particularly interested in seeing Just's new nosewheel version of its tail dragger Highlander model. This is a modification that I am still thinking about as it pretty well eliminates the possibility of a landing mishap from "ground looping". I was pleased to see that it does not detract from the plane's overall appearance or its flying characteristics. All in all, it was a very enjoyable weekend spent with some longtime flying friends and it gave me a chance to get out and see some of the new designs and ideas that are taking hold in this relatively new classification of aircraft...the LSA.



Entering the "midway" area of Sebring's Expo



Skip Barber runs the race track driving school



In front of Just's new nose geared Highlander



The 1916 historic Kenelworth Inn was a wonderful place to stay



There are plenty of fly-bys to watch all day long