

A first visit to AERO

By MIKE TAYLOR

As a first-time visitor to AERO Friedrichshafen, the biggest general aviation event in Europe, my impressions were highly favorable.

Having been to Berlin's air show twice, I've found the German capital's event to be all about big aircraft and military. AERO, on the other hand, is billed as the Global Show for General Aviation. This year, more than 600 exhibitors from 35 countries and 33,000 visitors from all over the world attended the show, which was held April 15-18.

There were products covering the whole industry from ultralights, gliders and gyros which, by the way, represent a large market in Europe, to business jets, helicopters and electric aircraft, as well as avionics and maintenance. There was even a designated hall for Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) at this year's show.

The event space is large. Its halls are spread out and connected by spacious hallways and courtyards full of light. The interconnected buildings are finished and styled in a contemporary fashion. It's a showcase of architectural acuity and national pride.

The event center, which functions year round, is adjacent to Friedrichshafen Airport. It's apparent organizers have invested heavily and thoughtfully in the exposition. Even the hangar floors are lacquered in black, yet the space retains a bright, airy feel. Contrast this to the four main hangars at AirVenture Oshkosh where the aisles are often crowded, and on warm days can be a sweltering, cramped experience inside.

But comparing the two is missing the point. AirVenture stages adventure, as its name applies. At the "World's Greatest Aviation Celebration" in Wisconsin, there's a general enthusiasm that its crowds, the endless rows of airplanes, and the smaller indoor spaces draw out.

At AERO this was less evident. The show is more formal. It has the feel of a National Business Aviation Association convention. There's less outdoor activity and certainly an absence of things "experimental." There is a contrast one can make here, however general aviation is a common thread.

Getting around the vast halls at AERO can be done in a day. But, if on foot you'll need a comfortable set of soles. The landing distance from Hall A1 to Hall A7 is about 2,000 feet, but with lots to see and places to rest along the way you'll likely not think about the distance you're covering.

One alternative on the mobility front I noticed was a presence of kick scooters, microbikes and skateboards, both inside and out. Don't expect to see these anytime soon at Oshkosh. There you're more likely to have a run-in with a golf cart. But the smaller wheels of scooters, bikes and boards are possible in the halls at AERO.

As I walked the halls, I noticed Flight Team had some odd names with its Virus SW and Sinus high-wing offerings. Both feature a T-tail supported by a copter-like



Tarragon Aircraft was showing off its speedster made using carbon technology.



The retractable gear Ellipse Spirit was flying high at AERO.

boom, similar in appearance to a Diamond DA20 Katana. I imagined making a radio call, "Virus on Short Final" and pictured the Centers for Disease Control alongside the FAA greeting me in hazmat suits on landing.

Working my way back east after darting down the row of "A" halls, I discovered Hall B3 filled with composite aircraft of all shapes from manufacturers with names like Skyleader, Pipistrel, Roko, Ellipse, One Aircraft, Magnus, and Remos. This hall of aircraft exposed a diverse selection of European manufacturers from Poland, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and Russia.

There was also the VH2 Streamline from

France that resembles the Ellipse with its tapered/elliptical wing and tail shapes. These "innovations" are a sharp departure from the Cessna 172 with its more-or-less rectangular wing shape.

Then, I encountered the composite Airo Aviation Legend that no doubt borrowed its lines from the 172. At a distance it looks like the Cessna's clone.

New to me was JMB Aircraft's VL3 evolution. It claims to be the world's fastest side-by-side ultralight aircraft. Evektor was there; it has been in the US for a number of years. Bristell was beside Tarragon, a tandem, slippery looking bird with retractable gear.

Groppo was one craft I'd read about and had hoped to see. An anticipated demo flight I'd planned a few months back did not happen. But the aircraft was at AERO. I was expecting a variation on a Cub. Its exterior lines echo this in photos I'd seen. However, I was surprised to see that this plane is far from that of the traditional Cub. This one's been completely rethought. With more aluminum than most Cubs and more variation, it offered a glance at building things differently.

Designer Nando Groppo has definitely give consideration to building his airplane in a way that's practical, simple and uses stock materials. He's sidestepped the need



Skyleader from the Czech Republic was showing off its stylish Marco.



The TL-2000 Sting S4 from Czech manufacturer TL Ultralight had helpers to draw attention to its display.



The curious looking Pioneer 300 from Alpi Aviation was dressed in Luftwaffe markings and safety orange tips.



Among the engines on display in the Flieger Magazine booth was the Rotax 912iS.

tradition of aircraft design and manufacturing. Both airplanes are designed for the EU's ultralight and the U.S. LSA categories. Their intended purposes are for travel, pilot training and glider towing.

Next, was the composite Atec from the Czech Republic. This one looks like the Katana with its boom-style aft fuselage and T-tail. Its neighbor was the familiar CT from Flight Design. I say familiar because it's the leading manufacturer in the US S-LSA market.

One curiosity was Alpi Aviation's Pioneer 300 dressed in Luftwaffe markings and safety orange tips. This particular model was the 100-hp Hawk. It was virtually seamless aft of the engine cowling. I can't help but imagine that they've positioned this as a product for military enthusiasts. It looks like a lot of fun to fly and will certainly be a head turner at any airfield.

The other halls were likewise filled with interesting displays. Some big hardware, in the GA arena, from Pilatus and Quest was there, as well as Mooney, Piper, the TBM 850, and HondaJet.

Concept aircraft on exhibit included the ypselon/gt. This Belgium startup was pushing a "fly different" agenda with its V-tail pusher. It's stylish, electric and futuristic.

Like the big shows in the U.S., AERO offered a number of talks and workshops. I sat for a Garmin G3X Touch presentation and felt right at home, as if at OSH or SUN 'n FUN.

AERO Friedrichshafen is one event that's a must-do for any aviator. The overall experience is refreshing, informative and rewarding. It's a candy store for pilots, and as with European chocolates, folks in the United States think that Lindt, Toblerone, Milka and others are just dreamy.

So the next time AERO comes around, I suggest you make this dream into a reality and plan to attend.

Next year's show is slated for April 20-23.

for complex manufacturing, machining, milling, etc. Overall it appears to be well thought out.

Also catching my eye was Blackshape Prime, a sleek, tandem airplane. If you're looking for a personal jet fighter that qualifies as ultralight or LSA, this is your bird. The company is headquartered in Monopoli (Bari Province) Italy, on the Adriatic Sea.

Skyleader, an aircraft manufacturer from the Czech Republic, was showing off its stylish Marco. My first thought was that this one was Italian. Marco shows that style rules throughout the European theater.

The all metal Viper and Skyper were seen in the Tomarkaero booth. The Viper is a low-wing with a glass canopy resembling an RV-6/7. The Skyper is a high-wing resembling Flight Design's CT. Tomarkaero is from Slovakia, a country with a proud