AERO Friedrichshafen Brings Out the Brightest in European Aviation

By Mike Taylor

AERO 2019, the leading European trade show for general aviation, was again hosted at Messe Friedrichshafen on the northern banks of Lake Constance in central Europe. The exhibition and its massive indoor hangar/halls deliver a consistently pleasing balance of trade fair, camaraderie, evolution, esprit de corps, solidarity, and fine cuisine. AERO lacks the enormity, the casual spectators, and the frequently petulant weather of comparable U.S. shows; and that's just fine with the vendors and shoppers it's devised to draw.

Europeans categorically think of General Aviation (GA) as those aircraft not used in scheduled or chartered air traffic, essentially characterizing them as "sport" aircraft with the occasional appendage of "utility." Notwithstanding, there is always an adjunct of commercial and military aviation thrown in at AERO too. Much of what might be characterized as purpose-built aircraft in the U.S. is pleasantly folded into sport aviation in Europe, and this is particularly evident at the show. Style is pervasive, flair dominates, and a strong sense of nationalism and personality distinguish one European offering from another.

Take for example the Blackshape Gabriél. This sexy, innovative aircraft is an outgrowth the company's Blackshape Prime – a popular choice worldwide for sport flying. Co-branded with Transavia, Gabriél is a prime example of the crossover between sport and utility. It derived from a collaboration with the airline Transavia, an Air France/KLM subsidiary, and Gabriél's intended role is in training commercial pilots.

Derived from the stylish Blackshape Prime, the Italian design group has teamed with Transavia, an Air France/KLM subsidiary, to promote the Gabriél as a flight training platform. *(Mike Taylor)*

Ultralight aviation also characterizes a large part of GA in Europe where it maintains a distinctly different certification class from its U.S. counterpart. AERO is dominated by light aircraft. However, at this show, this distinction may include any number of certification standards, including Microlight, Ultralight (UL), Very Light Aircraft (VLA), the U.S. standard Light-Sport Aircraft (LSA), and a large number of small EASA CS-23 / FAR Part 23 certified aircraft.

Examples of light aircraft seen at AERO spanning the various certification classes include the Blackwing Shark from Sweden and the Fly Synthesis Syncro from Italy. Blackwing claims, in Europe alone, there are 500 new Microlight registrations every year. The Fly Synthesis Syncro is available as an LSA or UL meeting their respective country's weight and performance requirements.

Blackwing Sweden Shark is, according to its paint scheme, "A type of airplane that flies safe and efficient." *(Mike Taylor)*

Fly Synthesis Syncro UL is the Italian company's fastest model. *(Mike Taylor)*

General aviation in Europe flourishes at the intersection of speed and style. Other celebrities making their appearance at AERO were the Tomark Viper SD4 from Slovak Republic and the colorful Belmont Patino from Latvia. The Viper SD4 claims to be "ideal for sports, entertainment, and recreational flying," as if one of those avocations was not all encompassing. The Belmont Patino is an infinitely customizable aircraft meant to suit any buyer's preferences with its host of styling and equipment choices.

AERO is, in the words of Messe Friedrichshafen CEO Klaus Wellmann, "Europe's largest exhibition for general aviation, and with regard to innovations and premieres, it's the industry's foremost exhibition in the world." He speaks faithfully with regards to sheer numbers of aircraft displayed at an indoor exhibition, and in particular of one- to two-place aircraft. The show makes its mark with a dose of European flair. At the TL 3000 Sirius by TL Ultralight and the VL-3 Evolution JMB Aircraft displays, visitors were greeted with beauty and style by damsels in dress.

The Tomark Viper SD4 is all metal two-seater from the Slovak Republic. *(Mike Taylor)*

The colorful and smartly equipped Belmont Patino comes from Latvia. *(Mike Taylor)*

The TL 3000 Sirius by TL Ultralight greeted guests with a touch of pageantry. *(Mike Taylor)*

JMB Aircraft, "makers of the world's fastest UL aircraft," offered salutations to passersby. *(Mike Taylor)*

AERO Offers More

While the most crowded areas at AERO were designated for general aviation services, equipment, engines, pilot supplies, and avionics (including Garmin, which is gaining a foothold in Europe), in particular the corridors connecting Halls A3 through A6, there were many more exhibits to browse for aviators with a wide range of interests.

Twelve large hangar halls at Messe Friedrichshafen are complemented by an outdoor static display. This area was populated by pre-owned aircraft for sale, a small collection of military and historic aircraft, and the Europa-Park Zeppelin tethered on the adjacent airfield, Bodensee Airport Friedrichshafen. German military technology was observable at AERO. Inside were search-and-rescue and law enforcement helicopters. Outdoors was a steadily visited German Air Force (Luftwaffe) Panavia Tornado multirole combat aircraft, i.e. fighter jet.

Europe also loves its glider/sailplanes, perhaps since they typically offer the most economical method of entry and the best true flying experience for new pilots. The most basic pilot license in Europe, the Light Aircraft Pilot License (LAPL) is available for airplanes, helicopters, sailplanes and balloons but can be used only in Europe. However, from the LAPL holder on up, one gets full credit for the theory and flight experience towards more advanced licenses. With a Private Pilot License (PPL) for airplanes and helicopters, as well as with a Sailplane Pilot License (SPL) and Balloon Pilot License (BPL), one can exercise their pilot privileges also outside the E.U. Holders of SPL and BPL licenses can add commercial privileges.

In 2019, the glider displays were moved to Hall A1 at main entrance, perhaps again to lure those entertaining the notion of pilot training. The star of the show (among gliders) was the L-23 Super Blaník, a remake of the classic glider from Let Kunovice of the Czech Republic. It is used by the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol as a trainer for cadets.Flying

This L23 Super Blaník is a remake of the classic glider from Let Kunovice of the Czech Republic. It is used by the U.S. Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol as a trainer for cadets. *(Mike Taylor)*

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enthusiasts in Eastern and Western Europe differ ideologically according to Christoph Becker, editor of FliegerRevue magazine. Speaking specifically with regards to their fascination for both old and new facets of aviation, the East is rife with engineering, design, development and has a long history of manufacturing. Becker commented, the aircraft featured FliegerRevue provide "aviation eye-candy" for those unfamiliar with the many eastern designs and challenged by the magazine's German language.

Junkers Flugzeugwerke of Dübendorf, Switzerland was one of the Swiss aircraft makers represented at the AERO. The company is currently building a second replica of the six-seater Junkers F13 all-metal transport plane. It was originally constructed in 1919 and the company was there to celebrate the aircraft's 100-year anniversary. A recently completed F13 is flying under the Rimowa moniker. The company hopes to produce at least five units of this classic design, all from original blueprints.

When old and new technology meet, the results are some distinctively interesting aircraft that seem to exist without any particular reference to time and place. Those at AERO 2019 fitting this description included a single-seat biplane Bücker Bü 133 Jungmeister and a FK12 Comet tandem folding-wing biplane produced in Germany. The Bü 133 Jungmeister "Liesel Bach" was named for the first woman to fly over Mount Everest. The FK12 Comet from FK-Lightplanes is a tandem folding-wing biplane made in Germany; it's where new technology meets classic styling.

This Bücker Bü 133 Jungmeister "Liesel Bach" was named for the first woman to fly over Mount Everest. (Mike Taylor)

With the FK12 Comet tandem folding-wing biplane from Germany, new tech meets classic style. (Mike Taylor)

Power to the Piston

Sustainable and e-flight (electronic flight) technologies continue to be nascent in the aviation world. However, one remarkable design presented at AERO 2019 was the vertical take-off and landing e-flyer AutoflightX. It's purported to be the best 3D mobility solution for people and goods. Another entirely new and unusual-looking aircraft featured at the show was the "flying wing" made by Horten Aircraft from Eisenach, Germany. Both examples are exploring non-traditional aircraft design with the application of modern technologies.

AutoflightX plans to elevate transport with electric vertical take-off and landing vehicles. (Mike Taylor)

Two Sides of the Atlantic

North American and European aviators maintain a strong bond despite the expansive Atlantic divide between them. This bond is evidenced in nearly every vendor present at AERO 2019. All were well aware that their market is not limited to just one continent. For example, Airplus of Friedrichshafen, Germany, which markets unique products for aircraft performance and customization, is working with customers on both sides of the ocean performing installations of ADS-B equipment in business aircraft. Their growth into this market is the result of overwhelming demand in the U.S. exacerbated by the FAA's 2020 mandate and deadline.

Avionics vendors too are seeing opportunity in the competitive arena of cockpit management. In addition to the aforementioned Garmin, Dynon Avionics is finding that popularity for its products is materializing throughout Europe, likely due to its comprehensive approach to cockpit/panel design. Watch for Dynon to continue its expansion into Europe where a strong light aviation market thrives.

At AERO 2019, a number of exhibitors admitted to being travel-worn, having just arrived from a week in Florida at the Sun 'n Fun International Fly-in & Expo, an event in the process of re-branding itself as Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo. Back-to-back shows this year, between Sun 'n Fun and AERO, put a strain on expo personnel. Curiously, though perhaps favorably, the two shows will occur at the same time in 2020, making it imperative that duties be divided and back-to-back travel be eliminated. Although, participants might still try to attend both spending a few days at one with a non-stop flight between Orlando and Zurich in the middle. As aviators go, they tend to be an adventurous sort. AERO 2020 will be held April 1–4.