

AIRCRAFT

Midwest LSA Expo Focused on Putting Pilots in Airplanes

The annual event brings potential buyers and sellers together at Mt. Vernon Airport in Illinois.

By Rob Mark Yesterday at 12:32pm

2 Comments



The idea behind the Midwest LSA Expo in Mt. Vernon, IL, was to bring potential buyers and salespeople together on the ramp.

Rob Mark

Most airplane shows want to offer people a chance to see aviation up close, especially the aircraft themselves. A secondary, though often unspoken goal, is to convince some of those visitors to seriously consider buying an airplane.

At the recent Midwest LSA Expo in Mt. Vernon, IL, airport manager Chris Collins said the idea right from the start was to bring serious buyers together with any of the dozens of LSA salespeople on the ramp. The show ran September 7-9 at an airport located, according to Collins, "Within an eight-hour drive for 50 percent of the population of the United States."

The show brought 34 exhibitors from around the Midwest and a few hundred people over the three days. The actual number of visitors is not really known because no one kept track. Admission to the show was free and there was no registration necessary. Collins said the lack of hard numbers is no marketing fluke. The show is just being true to its original mission, connecting pilots with potential aircraft sellers, a goal that's remained unchanged through all nine consecutive years of the event. Collins added that his measurement of the show's effectiveness really comes up in conversations with exhibitors who tell him what they experienced. "This year, they sold three aircraft at the show and got close on three more," he said.

There's really more to the Midwest LSA Expo than just selling airplanes as this *Flying* editor learned after a 1+45 trip from KPWK to KMVN. Mt. Vernon is a tiny town of 15,000 or so sitting 60 miles north of the Ohio River in the southeast part of the state. The airport has a couple of nice hard-surfaced runways, one nearly 6,500 feet long, as well as a well-manicured grass strip.

As I unloaded baggage from the airplane into the rental car, the aroma of some spicy food hit me. The line guy said they were getting ready for the big welcome BBQ courtesy of a local outfit, Grandma Deb's BBQ. I had just enough time to get back to the main hangar before Nashville's Patch Lee started tuning up for an afternoon's of country music. This was definitely not a big-city show for the dozens of people who started grabbing food and drink before talking about airplanes ... the dozens on the ramp as well as those that didn't make the show. The conversations and music made for a great ending of day one.



The mission of the Midwest LSA Expo has never been about the attendance, as much as it's bringing people together.

Rob Mark

Being a big airplane guy, the three-day event gave me more than a handful of great LSA story ideas. After talking to dozens of people, I came to realize just how much larger this population of pilots and their aircraft is. There was certainly no shortage of passion for aviation around Mt. Vernon.

Collins explained the first Midwest LSA Expo was created almost by accident, when a previous airport board chairman began asking questions about LSAs related to some personal medical conditions. The fact that MVN also had a Jabaroo salesman based on the airport didn't hurt either. Collins, a pilot himself, had also attended the Sebring LSA show that happens each January in Florida and said he wanted to help create this show in the spirit of that event, which he did with help from the Mt. Vernon Chamber of Commerce and the town's business development people. Collins said, in fact, "The Midwest LSA owes quite a bit of its success to the folks at Sebring."

Despite being relatively new to LSAs, I'm glad I made the trip because it gave me a chance to see airplanes I'd not had a chance to see up close, like the Zenith line, the Rans, the SkyArrow and the Ekolot Topaz, to name just a few. Belle Aircraft was front and center as I crossed the ramp with owner/demo pilot James Wiebe already taxiing out for what a ramp person mentioned was "another" demo flight.

By the next morning, the sky was beginning to fill up with arriving aircraft, not to mention all the exhibitor machines buzzing around the traffic pattern reminiscent of the early days of AirVenture when locals took to the skies as soon as the sun was up.

With my own thoughts of the Sebring and Oshkosh in my head, I realized there must be more good LSA stories to come. Mark your calendar for the 10th anniversary Midwest LSA Expo, already scheduled for the first week of September 2018. Collins said the goal will be the same as the past nine years. "We want to encourage new pilots to come because I'm offering a place where people can test fly an airplane without interruptions. It's the place where the customers can talk to exhibitors and then go fly."