



Trip Report **Oshkosh 2005**

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"That which does not kill me, makes me stronger" (paraphrased from Nietzsche). Or, if you're bored with the \$100 hamburger, try flying in some BUSY airspace.

Not content with simple cross-country trips to pretty places like Ocracoke Island (to be covered eventually in another trip report), I decided this year to make the trip to Mecca, aka Oshkosh "Airventure". Ok, I'd been there a few times but never flown in, so why not see it as God and the Clyde Cessna intended, in my own plane?

My son Matthew and I set out Wednesday, July 27 from TYS in our trusty Skylane, 9499Z. Our plan: land at Midway in Chicago, overnight with friends, then press on to OSH the next day with friends on board. We chose MDW because my pilot friend Sergio lives in Oak Park, IL and it's the most convenient airport to his home. He's done his flight training there and feels very comfortable with the place.

If you read about this year's show, you are aware that a cold front blew through the Midwest Sunday night, July 24. The remnants of that front were still lurking between us and the Midwest as we took off. Didn't look too bad on the radar; briefer said no worries until northern Indiana. Off we went, IFR. Things started looking dicey as we crossed into Kentucky, and we began the "bob and weave" around the building wall of level 3+ precip conspiring to block our northward course. I diverted as far west as Nashville, actually backtracking south for a while and being handed off from Atlanta to Memphis Center, then Nashville Approach, then back to Memphis. Everybody was doing the dance, even the jet traffic.

I finally found a weak spot, squeaked through it towards Lexington vortac, and resumed northward progress. The NEXRAD picture behind us wasn't pretty, and our hole quickly closed up as the precip intensified to level 4.

After that, except for light rain in northern Indiana, we had VFR conditions into MDW. I was cleared "to the numbers" for 4R behind a 737 and told to hurry it up. As we turned off the runway, it seemed the next Southwest 737 was clearing the fence on 4R behind us. Yikes!

Welcome to the big city! Atlantic Aviation, on the South Ramp or Tower Ramp at MDW, charges a \$30 overnight fee + \$7.50 Chicago landing fee (single engine). They'll waive the overnight if you buy at least 15 gallons of fuel- at \$5/gallon! Turns out they are the best of the lot; Signature and MillionAir charge more like \$50 overnight and they don't waive it. Of course, their 100LL was a mere \$4.43 a gallon. I learned this in retrospect, having chosen Atlantic because Sergio recommended it. The lineman was out there before I could switch to their ARINC and our bags were in their very nice terminal in a heartbeat.

I would conservatively estimate that MDW is about eight times as busy as TYS. More like Nashville. It is quite noisy out on the ramp as there is always a jet taking off or landing. Bring earplugs or keep your fancy ANR headset on while preflighting.

We overnighted in Oak Park, and then set out for Oshkosh with Sergio and his son Lucas aboard. The weather was VFR and we were in the mood for sightseeing, so we took off eastward toward the lake. One way or the other, you gotta get around the hulking monster to the north that is O'Hare. Don't bother asking for a VFR transition through their Class B—they don't even have time to laugh at you. Midway tower signs off about the time you get to the shore, so you squawk 1200 and stay below the ORD outer ring, and you are on your own.

Before Duh Mare destroyed Meigs Field, you could get VFR flight following along the lakeshore from Meigs tower. I did it once with Sergio, years ago in a rented plane. We even landed at Meigs that day. Sigh. Now all those dangerous GA airplanes are in a VFR free-for-all, just seconds from the tall buildings. With the Oshkosh in full swing, there were lots of small planes up and down the lakeshore and I was very happy to have another pilot in the right seat, especially one familiar with the area. We stayed at 2,000 and the southbound traffic was generally around 2,400 to 2,500. Local custom?

We turned inland between Palwaukee and Kenosha. Shortly, we performed a textbook head on collision avoidance maneuver with a southbound Cessna 152, both peeling right just like the AIM says. The air was alive with chatter from the planes headed north.

The EAA publishes a NOTAM each year regarding arrival and departure at OSH during the show. They strongly advise, weather permitting, that IFR arrivals cancel 60 miles out and join the VFR procession at Ripon, a town 30 miles southwest of Oshkosh. They want you at 1,800 feet, 90 knots, and ½ mile in trail along the railroad tracks that lead into Oshkosh. At the next waypoint, Fisk, they identify you visually and tell you on the approach freq. which runway to fly to. You don't talk back, just rock your wings. A runway controller picks you up on downwind and either tells you to follow the previous guy or do something else. They have large colored spots painted on the runways, so they can land more than one airplane at a time, e.g., "White Cessna, land on the green dot, runway 27."

Well, we didn't quite make it that far. They were so backed up that airplanes were holding, per procedure, over a lake north of Ripon. All planes south of Ripon were told to circle the town and wait. Circle and wait we did, for about 20 minutes. At one point, in response to someone's question, I called that there were 3 a/c circling Ripon. "Four", "five", "six", on up to "ten" came the replies.

As soon as allowed, we headed up the tracks to Fisk. We were identified, rocked our wings, and switched to the freq for Rwy 27. We were following a Cherokee and a Velocity before him, ½ mile in trail, 90 Kts, 1800 feet. As we approached and turned base to final, we were abruptly told to make right traffic for an inbound jet; then cleared to land on the green dot. Per protocol, we turned off the runway ASAP onto the grass, whereupon we were directed down, around and back up the other side of 27 to grass parking very close to Basler Flight Services, one of the two FBOs at OSH. Taxiing alone took about 20 minutes.

You've got to hand it to the EAA; they are supremely well organized. There were CAP younglings with flags every 100 yards directing the ground traffic, then a volunteer guy on a 4-wheeler for the last 200 yds to our parking. We got a fuel tag as we shut down. The heck with fuel, it was time for...

The Show

I have to confess: I found the show itself a little anticlimactic. I really enjoyed seeing Spaceship One/White Knight and Global Explorer, especially the flybys they did on Saturday. Remarkably, there were no really huge aircraft. The military a/c present were the usual F-16, A-10, F-18, C-

130, etc. standard issue. They did have 3 Marine Harriers land together (noisy!) and a formation flight with two P-51s, an F-16, and an F-4 Phantom II. But there wasn't anything over the top like a B-2 or Concorde fly-by.

I quickly lose interest in how hard Sean Tucker or Patty Wagstaff or whoever can fling around an aerobatic plane. Formation flying with AT-6's also gets old. Has anyone ever STC'd a quieter propeller for the AT-6? Dang, they are noisy. I would really like to see the Snowbirds or the Blue Angels or Thunderbirds at OSH, but those seem to be reserved for the more prosaic regional shows.

The coolest plane, IMHO, was the Dornier tri-motored amphibian, part of the "Dornier Project", there to raise money for UNICEF. It's a WWII-era flying boat the Germans and later the Spanish used for air-sea rescue, since refitted with PT-6 turbines and wheels. It took part in a 7-plane trimotor procession on Saturday. Now *that's* a little unusual.

All the manufacturers are pushing glass panels. It's interesting to see the old familiar Cessnas, Pipers, and Mooneys with huge multifunction flat panels. The Very Light Jets are finally nearing production reality. Cessna, Adam, and Eclipse all flew their offerings around the patch. Honda had their prototype jet there, although they incorrectly claimed they were the first with above-wing, pylon-mounted engines.

We spent one morning at the Seaplane base, watching the aquatic goings on. Leigh Castleberry, whom I ran into at the AOPA membership tent, partied with the seaplane folks Saturday night, so she can fill you in about that.

Having once been an engineer, I am fascinated by aircraft engine technology so I gravitate towards that. We literally stumbled across a Super Cub with a 180hp gas turbine engine and 3-blade variable pitch prop brought by Innodyn, formerly Affordable Turbine Power. The Deltahawk people had a small booth in one of the big metal buildings. They are poised for production for the experimental market of their 2-stroke, liquid-cooled diesel engines. We had a great technical discussion over the Theilert engine in a Diamond diesel Twin-Star with an engine designer who is not affiliated with Diamond or Theilert, a Mr. Davek. He had recently designed a V-6 aerodiesel for a military UAV helicopter. He explained to us the intricacies of common-rail, high-pressure (18,000 psi!) direct injection systems found in modern European diesel cars, such as Mercedes (from which the Theilert engine is derived) and Volkswagen.

The four of us stayed at the U. Wis Oshkosh dorms. It's easy enough to get transportation there from the airport. We used a city bus, a taxi, a restaurant courtesy car, and once got a ride from an old guy who lives two blocks from KOSH and was being nice. The rooms aren't air-conditioned. The on-campus cafeterias serve fairly priced, reasonably good food.

We left right after the show Saturday. Once the field was open, we piled into 9499Z and taxied to 27. A bunch of people had lined up during the show on 9, but the wind had shifted so they were SOL. Ha! The controllers lined us up on alternating sides of the runway and released VFR traffic at 10-second intervals. Matthew was psyched because the plane departing immediately behind us was a B-17!

An hour later we were back in Chicago airspace. This time, we were approaching from the Northwest. Here, Sergio's experience proved invaluable. We flew below O'Hare C, between it and DuPage D, hung a left, and called Midway approach/tower on 118.7. Cleared 4L, follow the jet in, straight to the numbers, best speed, hold short 4R, cross 4R, Foxtrot to Xray, then back to Atlantic Aero. No sweat!

After a nice evening and leisurely morning in Oak Park, it was time to leave for home. Atlantic was like a different place. The beautiful counter girls were all in church. The counter service was

indifferent, the plane wasn't fueled yet, and nobody offered a golf-cart ride out to the ramp. Oh, and did I mention the 100LL was still \$5.00 a gallon?

We eventually made a VFR departure on 31L, turned right as instructed and headed southeast over the southern tip of Lake Michigan, staying north of Gary Class D. Destination: the cheapest gas around at Clarke County, IN (OXI), some 26 miles away. There, for a mere \$2.70 per, you can top off, eat their free hot dogs and be on your way. They have two self-serve pumps, two runways (one grass), and new air-conditioned pilot lounge with charts and usual computer flight planning aids. Highly recommended.

Headed south again, we picked up our IFR clearance from South Bend Approach and ate our lunches over the vast Midwest wasteland that lies north of Tennessee and Kentucky. We finally climbed to 9,000 to get on top of the haze. Near the Tennessee line, the buildups began to form a nasty-looking wall of precip. The Orbcmm NEXRAD service was working well that day, and it really helped me pick my way around the worst stuff. About the time we overflew Windrock Mountain, Knoxville Approach directed us down. With a notch of flaps to keep the speed down and the engine warm, we headed steeply down to TYS. I made a greaser landing on 5R and we were tied down in the shade hanger just as the rain hit. It was good to be home.



On the Tower Ramp at MDW



Chicago from 2000 ft



On the Grass at OSH



Dornier Tri-Motor Amphibian



SpaceShip One and White Knight



Global Flyer



Innodyn turbine in a Super Cub



EAA Oshkosh Seaplane Base



Matthew in Columbia 400



Matthew and Lucas in Eclipse Jet