

# What Did You Miss at Oshkosh 2016?

*Amundsen Davis Aerospace Alert*  
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“Oshkosh” is many things all at once: airshow, tradeshow, flea market, networking event, family reunion, rock concert, marketing opportunity, public relations outreach, workshop, seminar, training class, professional development class, new product expo, showroom, incubator, fund raiser, museum, living history exhibit, barter exchange, revival, used product marketplace, fly-in and carnival. Everyone who goes has a different experience. For the past twelve years, I’ve been on site for the entire week. Similar to Bill Murray in “Groundhog Day,” I re-live the same week every year, but with minor tweaks and changes, I manage to slowly improve and optimize what Oshkosh means to me. Here are some of my highlights from 2016 – a delightful cast of characters and a myriad of cool events that highlight the Oshkosh magic.

**Dick Rutan:** We get used to hidden heroes at Oshkosh. Still, I was shocked when I found Dick Rutan standing alone before his forum on aircraft building began, and I was honored to have five minutes with him. We talked about the first composite aircraft flown to Oshkosh (by him) in 1974, and how the descendants and cousins of that aircraft now cover the fields. He heaps praise on Paul Poberezny for feeding and nurturing the experimental amateur-built (E-AB) industry. We shared musings about where the aviation industry would be today without the innovations developed in E-ABs. Then, he shared a story that speaks volumes about his view of government regulation. In his personal E-AB, he fashioned a unique placard the sits immediately below the FAA mandated passenger warning. The FAA mandatory placard reads, “Passenger Warning. This Aircraft is Amateur Built and Does Not Comply with the Federal Safety Regulations for Standard Aircraft.” In identical typeface, his additional placard adds, “That’s Why It’s Stronger, Safer, More Efficient and Exciting to Fly.” I managed to snap a photo of his airplane and the placards during my 2016 Oshkosh Adventure.

**Jake Pratt:** Jake Pratt is not unique or remarkable solely because he attended the last 11 “Oshkoshes,” but then again, he is only 13. Mike Pratt, Jake’s dad, is an old friend and even though I’ve met Jake several times, he always calls me “Mr. Farkas.” Mike is a proud member of the Metro Warbirds, and Jake has grown up with an extended family that he camps with annually at Oshkosh. Jake and his pals own Wittman Field the way most kids rule their neighborhoods. But, Jake isn’t just a fan. He is the proud owner of Citabria Aircraft he leases to Mike’s flight school, Louisville Aviation. Of course, Jake is also building time and is hoping to

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get his pilot license on his 16th birthday.

**Gene Soucy:** While I was plugging my battery powered electric car into a 220 volt outlet at one of the EAA hangars, a salty older man began to pepper me with questions. He was mostly fixated on the limitations imposed by the need to recharge the batteries – an intolerable limitation on his freedoms as far as he was concerned. As I began to defend the range of the car under most use, I noticed this “old guy” was climbing all over the bi-plane he was shining up, and I soon realized that it was *his* name emblazoned across the fuselage: “Gene Soucy,” a 50-year veteran aerobatics performer. I changed course, and merely responded, “This car probably wouldn’t work for you.”

**Harrison Ford and Bob Hoover:** I enjoyed a few minutes with Harrison Ford and Bob Hoover on separate occasions during the week. It’s been fun to share the pictures of me with these legends and to see where the conversations lead. Everyone knows Harrison Ford aka Han Solo aka Indiana Jones, but I’ve been surprised how few people outside of my bubble know what a strong supporter Harrison Ford has been to EAA and the Young Eagles program. Bob Hoover, on the other hand, is relatively unknown outside the aviation community and even industry insiders don’t necessarily recognize him in his 94-year old form. But everyone can appreciate his legend – stealing Nazi warplanes, supporting Chuck Yeager in the march to break the sound barrier in the X-1, and setting the gold standard for both test pilots and airshow performers.

**The Martin Mars:** The Martin Mars is accurately described as a flying boat. It’s a converted WWII era cargo and crew transport aircraft that scoops up seven thousand gallons of water as it comes down for sea-plane “touch and go-s.” It is both a relic and a marvel of technology that looks and feels as much like a submarine as a well-preserved early airliner. My opportunity to tour the Mars arose from the need to find a unique experience for the guest I was hosting and the generosity of my friend, Patrick Floyd, who works for Coulson Aviation, the owner/operator of the Mars.

**The Founders Innovation Prize:** I was at the 2015 forum where the challenger for the Founders Innovation Prize was announced, a \$25,000 prize for the best innovation to address loss of control accidents. Tuesday night, the five finalists presented their ideas and products to a packed audience. The ingenuity, passion, and creativity was astonishing, and the shark tank panel of industry heavyweights had a difficult time choosing a winner.

**John O’Keefe:** A friend in Seattle put John and I in touch with each other. John and a partner in crime flew his restored 1937 Spartan Executive to Oshkosh from the Seattle area as part of a gathering of seven Spartans to celebrate the aircraft’s 80th anniversary. John was proud of his aircraft and he thoroughly enjoyed the flight out.

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**William Stearman:** I was rooting around under the hood of my car (replacing a blown fuse) when an older gentleman approached. After answering his questions about my car, I asked him what brought him to Oshkosh. The exchange went something like this:

Man: "I'm here to honor my father's company."

Me: "Who was your father?"

Man: "Lloyd Stearman."

A bright light bulb went off at that moment. Stearman is part of the Boeing family, which was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Oshkosh in 2016. Of course, William Stearman has earned his own place in history through distinguished service in WWII, a decorated naval career, and significant diplomatic appointments. Yet, at that moment, he was simply a visitor to the great church of American aviation, lighting a proverbial candle for his father.

Of course, my 2016 Oshkosh involved lots of staring at the sky to watch dozens of aircraft perform impossible maneuvers, hangar talk, and ogling impeccably restored warbirds, antique, and classic aircraft. The week also included too many other friends, clients, and great moments to list. Still, I've included the events that will stand out as I look back on 2016, and I can't wait to begin to plan my next visit to Oshkosh.

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