

What Did You Miss At Oshkosh 2017?

Amundsen Davis Aerospace Alert
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This year marked my twentieth visit to “Oshkosh.” For the past 13 years, I’ve spent the entire week on the grounds to fully experience the unmatched activities, unique airplanes, and unforgettable moments. With each passing year, Oshkosh continues to grow, and 2017 shaped up to be no exception. Jumping a few light years ahead, this year’s “AirVenture” had more of everything: attendees, exhibitors, new aviation innovations, the U.S. Navy Blue Angels, astronauts, bombers, warbirds, modern fighters, homebuilts, classics, and so much more. Here are a few of my personal highlights from my 2017 Oshkosh Adventure.

Connie Palacioz: Connie was working the merchandise table to help support the restoration of “Doc,” one of only two flying B-29s (both Doc and Fifi were on site and flew together). Connie wasn’t just any volunteer. Not only did she work on Doc between 1943 and 1945, but she spent the past 16 years working on Doc’s restoration, following a 45 year career as a beautician after she was laid off from the Boeing factory.

Col. Harry Stewart: Colonel Stewart is one of the few surviving Tuskegee Airmen, and he was on site to help promote the Commemorative Air Force’s Red Tails Squadron, a project that uses the stories of the Tuskegees to inspire youth. You’d likely say that he looks and sounds great for a man in his 60s, but he’s 93! He’s sharp as a tack and had great stories to share.

Dennis Brooks: Dennis Brooks is a bit of a legend in the homebuilt community. I met him in front of his homebuilt Hummel Ultracruiser. He built it. He flew it to Oshkosh from his home in Kansas City. From a distance, the Ultracruiser could be mistaken for a warbird, but with a Rotax engine and a single seat cockpit it meets the ultralight limitations. That means it requires no pilot’s license to operate or particular qualifications to build or maintain. Dennis flew his ultralight to OSH at 55 knots while operating below 2,500 feet. He was one of the happiest people I met, and he is undoubtedly a true aviator.

Kitty Hawk: I was fortunate to meet several key people responsible for the Kitty Hawk Flyer and to witness one of several demonstration flights of the Flyer, over water, at the seaplane base. The Flyer is a single place, battery powered, octocopter. To the casual observer, the Flyer is easily dismissed; it has limited utility and minimal battery life. However, the name and company logo recall the Wright Flyer which flew for 12 seconds, covered 120 feet, and within a generation had set off an entirely new industry and means of travel. The Flyer, backed by

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Larry Page, just may be that similar first step into the unknown.

Uber Aviation: Uber has made headlines with its futuristic vision of automated flying-taxis. The team that I met at Oshkosh was anything but a bunch of starry-eyed gamers - they are serious and are working toward building out the infrastructure to make affordable private helicopter "hops" a reality in the not too distant future. Naturally, they fully appreciated that their ultimate goal of door-to-door autonomous transport will not be realized anytime soon, but they clearly have a vision of the steps that will get us there. And that process is well underway.

Jayne Doyle: Jane Doyle is one of the few living Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), and I was honored to be part of her first visit to Oshkosh. She helped to show off the recently restored B-13 that had been used as a trainer at Sweetwater, Texas, where the WASP were stationed during WWII. Jane generously shared stories of the WASP and her personal adventures. Despite long days and thousands of pictures Jane never lost her smile or good sense of humor.

"That's All Brother": This is the DC-3 that led the Normandy invasion. Although the restoration of this aircraft is far from complete, it is already drawing a crowd. Obviously, it carries great historical significance and there are high hopes that it will be soon restored to its former glory. Teams of volunteers are donating their labor while massive fundraising efforts are underway. Astonishingly, this aircraft was in line for an engine retro-fit so it could join the fleet of DC-3s used in South America as cargo transports when it was "rescued."

Obviously, this is only a small taste of what took place during my week-long adventure at 2017 Oshkosh. Despite my efforts, I'm sure that I still missed more than I caught at Oshkosh, but I'll keep searching and trying to get it right. I hope to see you there next year.

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