



Kiwi Flyers at Airventure Oshkosh 2009

An Exhibitor's Perspective

In terms of bringing the aviation community together, Airventure Oshkosh is perhaps the greatest event there is on the aviation calendar (approximately 600,000 people attend every year). Much has been written about Oshkosh from a visiting spectator's viewpoint, but what about from an exhibitor's viewpoint – and who was there in 2009 representing New Zealand products? KiwiFlyer asked Sandy Campbell from Campbell Aero Classics to write of her experience as a returning exhibitor.

AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH is a sure entry on any aviator's 'want to go' list. There are thousands of people who have been attending Oshkosh for as long as it has been running and they keep on coming back every year for this special week on the international calendar of aviation events.

Of course if you are in the business of selling to the aviation industry – particularly recreational aviation, this is the best place in the world to showcase your wares. This year five New Zealand trade exhibitors included Fly Inn NZ Flying Adventures (www.flyinn.co.nz), Spidertracks (www.spidertracks.com), Airmaster Propellers (www.propellor.com), Night Fly (www.nightflypanels.com) and ourselves, Campbell Aero Classics (www.campbellaeroclassics.com).

As an exhibitor, the week at Oshkosh is a huge week. As one American exhibitor described – it is 'brutal'. After your first couple of visits to Oshkosh, the role of an exhibitor takes on an almost déjà vu experience. There are the same people either side of us, a few new booths here and there and very much the same energy, enthusiasm and exhibitor comradeship.

Our trade stand is located in one of the four huge exhibitor hangars and the trade stands are open from 9.00am to 5.00pm daily for 7 days (Monday through Sunday). Setting up is done on the Sunday and the action begins in earnest on the Monday morning.

The people and atmosphere

The hangar aisles at times become quite literally a moving sea of people and only when the flying part of the airshow starts around 3.00pm do things ease. Often this is the first moment you have a chance to see what time it is. The days are just whirlwind blurs. Keeping up hydration levels becomes a very important task. There is no time for eating!



New Zealand representatives at Airventure Oshkosh this year included from top to bottom, Campbell Aero Classics, FlyInn NZ, Airmaster Propellers, Spidertracks and Night Fly.

contributed by Sandy Campbell

Usually the temperatures hover in the high 70/80s °F (Americans don't do Celsius) and at times launch into the 90s, ie. it is hot and very humid. This year, most untypically, the temperature range stayed just perfect for us in the 60s and 70s. What a huge difference that made.

We were not alone this year in wondering if the global recession was going to drastically affect the turnout at Oshkosh. If the wave of visitors to the hangars on the Monday morning was to be the indicator, there would have been a collective sigh of relief of all exhibitors at the show. The message seemed to be that there was indeed a very large crowd. It turns out that numbers were well up with Oshkosh 2009 having more aircraft and more people than there has been for a number of years.

Car parks had to be closed for more aircraft parking and some aircraft were diverted to nearby airfields as there was no room left anywhere. It was as if the aviation community were determined not to let this longstanding holiday break be affected at all by the doom and gloom merchants or the global recession. They turned out in their many thousands. In fact there were record numbers of attendees, with figures somewhere around 600,000 and from all corners of the earth.

The exhibitor's day

Our day begins early and we get to the airfield as early as we can to see what is new and take in some of the atmosphere of this special airshow. Breakfast is usually an airfield experience, with several large areas set up for American style breakfast. Our exhibitor neighbours are now quite used to us getting in just before opening time – we're extremely busy having a look at everything else before the hangars open for the public.

For us and I am sure the same will be said for most exhibitors, the Oshkosh show is a time for us to say hello to our clients and to get lots of feedback to propel and inspire us forward for another year. It is a chance to meet new people from all over the world, listen and share stories and smile through language barriers. Most importantly we spend time with our suppliers and foster new business relationships. The evenings are spent socially; an exhibitor's thankyou night

barbecue, a pilot magazine promotional night, sampling the local Thai and Chinese Restaurants and of course making the obligatory visits to the famous 'Kelly's Bar', as anyone having been to Oshkosh and staying at the University will understand!

Familiar and unfamiliar faces often greet us and in the midst of so many people, moments of name recalling amnesia are not uncommon. Just so many people, so many conversations and it all happening so quickly. Some familiar New Zealand faces come by, there's a moment to get them into the new context and a sigh of relief as the name rolls off the tongue. New clients, old clients, very famous people and not so famous people, all merge into the week of meeting and greeting.

The end of a great week

And then, just as quickly as it has begun, another Oshkosh is all done and dusted. Seven days of aviation, aeroplanes galore, campers everywhere, big planes, bi-planes, tri-planes, carplanes, float planes, tiny planes, warbirds and jets flying, with everyone having a glorious time. No strife, no litter, no police, no disturbances, just a magnificent crowd of people enjoying what they enjoy best.

It's hard to describe the size of Oshkosh. It is one of those things you have to do to really get a clue what it's all about. To the first timers it is simply huge and as one old timer (easily pushing 90) described "it's one helluva show and one helluva week".

The spirit of aviation

Our experience of the airshow is unique to us as exhibitors. We don't get to see as much as what we would like and that's just the way it has to be. It is an amazing show that is so well choreographed by the Americans, just like an orchestra with

everyone playing their part to make up the symphony.

There is so much to do and look at – workshops, forums, flying displays, food, aviation products, aircraft of every size, shape and design, every last bit of hardware that goes into making aircraft. It's all there – you've just got to find where it is. And the knowledge that comes together on that airfield – if you need to know something about aviation, that's where you'll find the answers.

Oshkosh is the one event that epitomises and captures that real essence and 'spirit of aviation'. Everyone is included, as everyone contributes to making up this magnificent feast of aviation, from the powered parachutes and ultralights right through to the warbirds, jets, and the massive transporters, this year with the Airbus 380 and Galaxy dwarfing everything else in sight.

Americans certainly know how to organise airshows and everything just falls into place. Many thanks must go to the thousands of volunteers who make this week what it is. The sight of dozens of light aircraft all on their final approach into Oshkosh – all being directed by air traffic onto a particular dot is just one of many things you won't see anywhere else.

Very highly recommended

If you haven't done it yet and you're into aviation, do it. Make the trip to Airventure Oshkosh. You'll be telling stories about your week at Oshkosh for years to come.

For more information

Visit the Airventure Oshkosh website www.airventure.org. Questions about this article or Sandy's experience at Oshkosh can be directed to Sandy Campbell at Campbell Aero Classics on 03 312 8008 or email: ivan@campbellaeroclassics.com.

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