

Hangar Talk

The “Lightning” Newsletter

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Introduction

This issue is dedicated entirely to Sun 'n Fun. First, Buz Rich offers his overview of the early April event that, like AirVenture 2010, was dominated by monumentally bad weather. Next, Mark Stauffer provides a fascinating, day-by-day account of his unforgettable adventure.

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Recap of Sun N Fun 2011 Buz Rich

I wish I could say that, again this year, I flew my “Lightning Stuff” Esqual, N31BZ, to Sun N Fun because it is always a relatively fast and easy five hour flight from Virginia to Lakeland in central Florida. However, this was the 75th Anniversary of the original Cub Convoy, so once again, like I did five years ago, I led a flight of Cubs to the Sun N Fun event. Damn, that is one slow airplane. It took a full day and a half of flying with three fuel stops to get there. To say I had a bad case of TB (tired butt) would be an understatement. My Cub was built in 1940 and comparing its performance to a Lightning would be like comparing the Wright Flyer to an F-22. It is slow, uncomfortable, slow, hard to pack, slow, unresponsive on the controls, and slow. It makes flying the Lightning seem like flying a responsive mach 2 easy chair. Yep, that would have been nice.



How to pack a Cub for a long trip.



Being a past Antique Champion at Sun N Fun, my Cub, NC31178, a 1940 Piper Cub Sport, gets a great parking spot in the Vintage area.

I am sure that everyone has heard by now about the devastating weather at this year's Sun N Fun. To start off with, bad weather throughout the US on the days leading

up to Sun N Fun, kept many people from being able to fly to Lakeland this year. In fact, five years ago we had 55 Cubs make the final flight into Sun N Fun as part of the Cub Convoy. This year, a total of 8 Cubs were parked in the Vintage area, and only four of those were able to make the flight together into Lakeland on Monday, the day before official opening day. Some other Cubs finally arrived later in the week, but many gave up trying to fly to central Florida, and turned around and flew back to their home bases. And that was the case for many aircraft that had planned to fly to Sun N Fun. Although overall attendance at the event was good, the number of aircraft flying into Lakeland was way below the normal amount for most years Sun N Fun events.

Many words can be used to describe this year's Sun N Fun; for most attendees, wet, muddy, and windy will come to mind, but for the many people that had their airplanes damaged or destroyed, this year's event will have everlasting bad memories of the dangerous thunderstorms and tornados that went through Lakeland Airport about noon on Thursday. Even the Lightning's sister company, Jabiru USA, had one of their brand new demonstrator aircraft demolished as you will see in the photo below.



Just a few minutes after this photo was taken, we had this Jabiru back right side up. It was hard to see obvious damage (it is one strong aircraft) but with the extensive water damage to the avionics and structural damage, it is probably totaled.



Back right side up.

But even with the bad thoughts of damaged or destroyed aircraft, the fun part of the show was still there. That fun comes from various things for different people. Some folks like the air show while others enjoy just looking at all the aircraft or walking through the numerous displays to see the latest aviation developments. For me, all of that is good, but I get my real enjoyment from seeing all my aviation friends; some of which I only see at either Sun N Fun or Oshkosh. Certainly spending time with all my friends in the Lightning community was the highlight for me. As you can see from some of the photos below, many Lightning owners and enthusiasts were in attendance.

A Sun 'n Fun Adventure Mark Stauffer

For some reason I think Mother Nature didn't want Sun 'n Fun 2011 to ever happen. It all started eight days before the show with the extended forecast showing beautiful weather for our planned departure date of Saturday, March 26th. For Sun 'n Fun we usually try to leave on the Saturday before the show, set up on Sunday and then relax on Monday before the craziness starts on Tuesday morning. As my excitement grew during the week the weather prognosticators showed the weather getting equally worse for our Saturday departure. Even Friday was starting to look iffy. By Wednesday I was pretty sure we would have to leave early and by Thursday morning the decision was made and we all set forth to compress two days of prep into one long day. Going early to a show has its challenges. We couldn't get into our rented condos a day early and we had not made provisions for a car so we set out to take care of those issues.

Friday dawned beautiful but there was weather on the way. We prepped the planes, loaded up, got final pilot briefings and were on our way by 8:15 AM. N326AL,

our Lightning LS-1 demonstrator, has XM weather on the Garmin GDU 375 and by our fuel stop in Georgia I could see that the rain was already to Nashville. The flight to Moultrie, GA (KMGR) was smooth at 4,500 with a nice tailwind. We like to stop at Moultrie during our trips south. They have a very nice FBO, friendly people, good gas prices, fresh chocolate chip cookies and an 80's vintage Chevy station wagon that we've affectionately named the "Battle Wagon" from the Mad Max movies. In years past we've loaded her up and driven into town for lunch at the Chick Fil A but this year we decided to "brown bag" it. After a nice lunch on the picnic bench we paid our fuel bill, loaded up and headed off for Lakeland.

It was a bit bumpy climbing up to 6,500' but once there it was smooth again and we still had our tailwind. We did go through some pretty thick haze for a period of time but by mid Florida it was a little clearer. The flight to Lakeland was pretty uneventful except for the gliders over Zephyr Hills just outside the Tampa class B. I had just switched over to the tower frequency to get an idea of what was going on at Lakeland when through the light haze I saw a glider at my altitude about a half mile away. He was "no factor" for me but I went back over to our "company" frequency and alerted the two Jabirus to be on the lookout for gliders. Once back on KLAL tower frequency I called 10 to the north and the controller set me up for a right base for 27L. After sequencing in three other aircraft I was given "N326AL you are cleared to land 27L." Once on the ground, Sun 'n Fun ground control gave me directions to a shut down spot and I started the quarter mile journey pulling the LS-1 down to the Light Sport Mall. As it turned out I was the first airplane to arrive at the mall so I put her in about the same spot as last year and tied down for the evening. Shortly after my arrival the two Jabirus were on the grounds and after a few moments were tied down in our main booth. Once buttoned up we headed out to check into the hotel and hit the pool.



Saturday was beautiful in Florida. Pete and Barb Krotje, Katie Bosman and I had some time to kill so we found a small diner for some breakfast and then decided to head towards Tampa to check out the town. We ended up parking in Ybor City and doing a bit of exploring. The town was still waking up at 10:30 in the morning so we took the trolley car to Channel Side in downtown Tampa. From there we did a bit more exploring and then ended up back in Ybor City having a Cuban sandwich and a beer in a great restaurant. We then visited an open air market and afterwards it was off to get the keys to our condos, buy some supplies and get ready for the arrival of Ben Krotje and Moostang Mike Jones who drove the truck and trailer down from Shelbyville. After some pool time, dinner and maybe a couple of beers it was time to call it a night.

On Sunday we discovered there was a new local diner near our condo so we tried it out before going over to the show grounds to set up. The food was good, the prices very reasonable and everyone left fueled up for the set up. Setting up the main Jabiru and Arion booths was a breeze since we've done it many times in the past. There was the usual running out to Home Depot and Walmart for missing items but soon Mike and I were meeting Max Voronin and Olena Manakina, our Florida Lightning dealers, for a late lunch. Barb and Pete ventured off on their own and Ben and Katie flew the Jabiru over to Sarasota to pick up another J-230 to put in the Light Sport Mall. Sunday also turned out to be Mike's birthday so we enjoyed a few cold ones by the pool and then had cake later in the evening. If you get the chance ask Tom Hoffman and Mike about the alligator.

Monday was pretty much a wash, literally. It started out sunny and bright but by noon it was raining cats and dogs and continued for most of the day and night. We went out early to the show grounds to tweak the set up and also check the position of LS-1 and J-230 in the Light Sport Mall. Thank goodness we did this before the rains came. By mid day Jack Gozenbach, our newest Lightning dealer had joined us as well. We had an impromptu Arion Lightning gathering at Champs Sports Bar and enjoyed some of the local cuisine including gator (no it doesn't taste like chicken!). All we were missing were the Green Landings gang. As it turned out most had driven down but Ryan Gross and Greg Crouchley were stuck somewhere in South Carolina waiting on weather.

Tuesday started out with the normal final adjustments and set up to the booths but by 0900 we were ready to go. The crowds were a little light but that's to be expected sometimes. There weren't the usual number of aircraft on the field, most likely due to the bad weather sealing off Florida from the rest of the US. Even so the Light Sport Mall saw good foot traffic and Mike, Dean and Jack stayed busy most of the day talking with the crowd. After a good first day we all adjourned to the pool to enjoy some cold beverages and discuss the day's events.

Wednesday started out pretty nice with favorable weather. Buz Rich and I headed over to the new Central Florida Aviation Academy, which is the new home to the forums, for the 0900 Lightning LS-1 talk. Nick Otterback was at home with his brand new son so it was my job this year to give the 1st forum. It was a small group but all were very interested in the LS-1. After the formal presentation I spent the next 40 minutes doing a question and answer session where the participants asked great questions. Many thanks to

Buz for his help and insight in answering questions! After the forum we stopped by the LSA Mall to check on Mike and Dean and talk further with forum participants. Soon I made my way back to the booth to see how things were going there. All of our dealers were there and talking with perspective customers and I helped out where I could.

Throughout the day the weather started to deteriorate to the point where they canceled the air show due to high winds and impending bad weather. In preparation of the arrival of bad weather we set extra tie downs and ropes to our tents and left the grounds right at five. Usually we're engaged in conversations and are late closing down the booth but on Wednesday the crowds left early once the air show was canceled. Wednesday night both Nick Otterback and my significant other Clare Terry flew in from Nashville. Unfortunately Clare flew into Orlando and Nick flew into Tampa. I'd called Clare and told her to buckle up because her flight into Orlando was going to be rough. As it turned out it was rough for both of them but they made it safely to Florida and then to Lakeland.

Thursday morning broke with some pretty foreboding weather. We were watching the Tampa news channel in the condo where things were not looking good for the day, but at least for the time being all of the bad weather was north of I-4 and Lakeland Linder airport was 2 miles south of I-4. We arrived at the show around 0815 and started the morning ritual of getting the booths and planes open for the day. Crowds were very light as would be expected and we all just kind of hung out and did what we could to pass the time. Clare and I wandered around the grounds for a little bit talking to vendors I work with and then stopped by the Bose booth to check out the new A20 headset. After a quick hello to the Zenith guys (I built a 601XL) we returned to the tent to see what was going on. Ben called me over to show me the latest Intellicast.com radar picture and things did not look good for Lakeland. We started to "batten down the hatches" in preparation for the weather that was headed our way and then waited for the storm to hit.

Now I want to go on the record as stating that we've held down this tent at least a half a dozen times during gust fronts and thunderstorms and never did I think it was going to be as bad as it was. Clare said to me that she was thinking of retreating to the OX-5 building behind us and I told her if she wanted to go, then go now. Unfortunately she hesitated about 30 seconds too long and was stuck with us in our 20' x 10' tent. When the first gust hit six of us grabbed parts of the Lightning tent and started to hold on. Again, nothing we haven't done in the past. Nick, Doug Koenigsburg, Tom Hoffman, Buz Rich, Jack Gonzenbach and I all just grabbed a pole and started to hang on. The thought did cross my mind briefly that we're holding onto a metal structure and lightning is striking pretty heavily all around us. I think even Jack may have said this wasn't the smartest thing we should be doing!

Within minutes we were soaked through to our underwear and Nick, Doug and I were taking the brunt of it in our faces. Actually nobody was immune since it pretty much was raining sideways! I really don't know how long the worst of it lasted since it all is such a blur. At first I had a humorous thought of Lt. Dan riding out the hurricane atop a shrimp boat in Forrest Gump but then I really did become worried that we may be

in serious trouble. When I watched the Jabiru J-230 get lifted up and flipped over 40' away from where I was standing I began to think we probably shouldn't be here! At that point though you're committed and to let go really wasn't an option. The Jabiru tent collapsed, the J-230 flipped over and then the next thing I remember is Pete sitting on the corner of the Jabiru tent just riding out the storm in a yellow poncho. He had crawled out from under the tent and at that point was just trying to keep the tent from blowing into us.



Ben suffered some bruised ribs from being lifted up along with the tent and then falling into several engine crates and a water bottle (which didn't budge throughout the whole ordeal until he fell on it).

A Husky in the booth across from us broke loose from its tie downs, weather vaned into the wind and started backwards down the walkway behind the FAA building. Throughout all of this I kept glancing over to our two customer Lightnings and was relieved to see that they were weathering the storm. After the J-230 flipped I worried that the J-170 may go over either on top of us or on top of our customer Lightnings. Luckily that never happened. The National Weather Service confirmed that there was an F1 Tornado that touched down about 150 yards away from our booth and there were winds of up to 95 MPH. I can honestly tell you there were times where I couldn't see 20' in front of my face for the wind and rain. At one point it started to hail with pea to marble size hail which just was the icing on the cake! I think all of us suffered a mild case of shock once it was all over and I really didn't realize what we'd endured until later that evening watching videos on YouTube.com. That's when it finally rang true for me.



Once the winds died down we all came out to survey the damage and to figure out what to do with the J-230. A group of Civil Air Patrol cadets came over from the booth behind us to lend a hand righting our upset Jabiru. Within minutes we had the J-230 back on its feet and tied down in the booth yet again. After that we set out to dismantle what was left of the Jabiru tent and secure what was left of both of our booths. Rumors started flying and the next thing we heard was there was another cell headed our way and it was supposed to be worse than what we had just endured.

Officials suggested we head to the FAA building to ride out the rest of the storms, so after we quickly cleaned up what was left of our booths we headed that way. Power was out and it was a real adventure to utilize the “facilities” in total darkness. The FAA staff were absolutely wonderful and gracious hosts during our stay in their production facilities, and we had a short meet and greet with Randy Babbitt the FAA Administrator. For two hours we waited for the cell that was “30 minutes away” and finally around 2:30 – 3:00 we were given the “all clear” for weather. As it turned out the cell split and went both north and south of Lakeland.

By this point Sun ‘n Fun had officially evacuated the show grounds and the Polk County Sheriff’s department was on the grounds telling everyone to leave or be cited for trespassing. This even applied to vendors trying to clean up their booth spaces. I guess I can’t blame Sun ‘n Fun for their decisions. There were power lines down, trees down, tents blown over and just basic mayhem. Add to this hundreds of “gawkers” and close to 70 aircraft damaged or destroyed and you have a real mess on your hands. Once we were confident that the remains of our booths wouldn’t cause further damage we left for the day as well.

It was nice to get back to the condo, change out of our wet clothes, grab a hot shower and digest what we had just experienced. Throughout the afternoon and evening Sun 'n Fun staff and volunteers worked to ready the grounds for the next day. The only controversial issue was the movement of damaged aircraft. I am friends with the Zenith crew and was told they were never contacted about the removal of their CH-750 from the show grounds. All damaged aircraft were moved to the east side of the field, ironically right next to the aircraft auction area. For our part we cooked out the best we could, relived the moment and then enjoyed the evening as best we could.

Friday dawned bright and sunny as if nothing had happened the day before. Nick and I basked in the morning sun as we walked over to the CFAA building for the second Lightning LS-1 Forum. It was lightly attended, but then again after what happened the day before it was to be expected. Also, there were real problems with the parking areas with some people sitting in line for 1-2 hours just to get in to park! When we departed that afternoon we saw cars parked up to 2 miles away on Pipken Road in frustration of the parking situation.

After the forum Nick and I headed back to the Lightning booth to help rebuild what we could of the Arion and Jabiru display areas. We were able to make most of a tent out of two and both of our companies called it home for the rest of the show.





Towards mid-day the crowds were back to normal and we saw good traffic through both the Light Sport Mall and Lightning and Jabiru booths. At noon we had our annual Lightning gathering of owners, enthusiasts, and friends and we all enjoyed roasted corn and soft drinks. Introductions were made by Nick and much hangar flying ensued. It was great seeing current customers and interacting with possible future customers. I keep saying that one of the wonderful things about our community is that we still know most if not all of our customers and consider them all family.



Friday evening also featured the annual nighttime air show. After a brief “after work” soak in the pool Jack, Clare and I headed back to the grounds to watch the show. The AeroShell team did their dusk routine followed by a patriotic Otto the helicopter, Manfred Radius in his glider and then closed out with Matt Yonkin in his incredibly illuminated Beech 18. The icing on the cake was a great fireworks display as we were driving off the grounds.



Saturday and Sunday also dawned glorious. Clare and I had breakfast at the local diner on Saturday and got to witness the balloon launch from the Sun ‘n Fun show

grounds. The wind was blowing out of the north and we had several balloons fly right over the Publix, diner and our condo. It was a wonderful sight and the staff from the diner and Publix all came out to watch the balloon fly over at tree top level. They all asked questions about how the show was going, how we survived the storms and generally wished us well. During the week we joked with the Publix staff about, and apologized for, causing massive traffic jams but after they witnessed the quiet beauty of the balloons flying overhead in the early morning light I think most of that was forgotten.



The drive in was normal and we noticed that there were several flatbed trucks in the “salvage yard” retrieving damaged aircraft for their journeys back to their owners or home airports. It was quite a sad sight driving by that area Friday, Saturday and Sunday and was a reminder that even though the sky was bright and sunny we’d suffered quite a blow just two days earlier. As it turns out our J-230 stayed in the booth the remainder of the show (it made a great static display) and when given the chance the Jabiru gang bragged on the structural integrity of the design. From a distance the plane didn’t even look damaged. You had to look closely at the vertical fin, the horizontal stabilizer and a slight bend in the wing strut to see any damage. Unfortunately though, it did have to take a truck to get back to Shelbyville. Fear not though, it was insured and Jabiru USA is in the process of rebuilding her. Saturday had a great crowd—Sun ‘n Fun officials say it was close to record setting for a Saturday—and traffic through the booths was steady. The Navy’s Blue Angels were great as usual as well as the rest of the air show.

Sunday had good crowds as well and all three booths stayed busy up until the start of the air show. Around 3 pm Dan Johnson, organizer of the LAMA “Light Sport Mall” and owner of By Dan Johnson.com offered to tow our LS-1 out to the tie down area. After single handedly pulling this plane the ¼ mile down to the LSA Mall I jumped at the

chance for a tug by a golf cart! Soon afterwards Mike and I had her tied down for the night and ready for the early Monday morning departure. We then ventured over to our main booths and worked on tearing down our display and packing it into our trailer.

By five o'clock we were all packed up and just had to wait until six to pull out of the show area. Jack, Clare and I headed out to the general parking area and proceeded to sit in one spot for over a half hour. Sun 'n Fun really needs to look more into their parking situation! Finally a spot opened up and I helped Jack maneuver the car to a side gate that many didn't know about. Within 15 minutes were back at the condo where we started to pack our bags. The truck was leaving that evening and if it wasn't going on the plane then it had to be on the truck! Around seven the truck departed with Ben, Pete and Mike and the three remaining crew retreated to the pool and then out to a late dinner.

Clare and I were up before dawn on Monday and Jack was kind enough to give us a ride to Lakeland-Linder airport. We untied the plane, loaded her up and attempted to un-fog the windows. Once Clare and I were buckled in and started Jack came over for a final wipe down of the canopy. On the inside I had to wipe down the canopy several times while taxiing out to the main runway just so I could see where I was going! After contacting ground and then the tower we were in the air by 0715 headed for our fuel stop in Moultrie, GA.

The night before had pretty grave projections for the weather in TN and with the XM weather fired up on the GDU 375 I watched the rain head towards Shelbyville. I didn't think we would be able to make Shelbyville but I'd hoped to make it to Huntsville or somewhere in that area. The wind forecast of 20 gusting to 30 didn't make me feel much better either. We did a "quick turn" fuel stop in Moultrie and then were back in the air trying to use our tailwind to our advantage. Southwest of Atlanta there was a cloud deck that I felt I should be get underneath since Shelbyville and points in-between showed overcast at 3500'. Finally at 2500' I was under the cloud deck but it was a wild ride. After about 20 minutes of getting tossed around in the sky I made the PIC decision to land at West Georgia Regional airport.

A year ago a customer of ours had to land there due to weather and they took care of him wonderfully by putting his Lightning in the large hangar. I knew there were rental cars available and as long as we had wheels Clare and I could improvise the rest! Clare is a wonderful co-pilot and turbulence doesn't bother her (thank goodness because there was plenty of it). We were getting bounced around so much that I had trouble reading the chart to see what the Unicom frequency was and it was almost impossible to use the EFIS screen to find it. Finally I was able to dial in the frequency, made my calls and entered the pattern. What a ride! I finally got the plane on the ground and parked in front of the FBO where we were met by the wonderful staff who allowed me to pull the plane into the hangar and chock her right next to a King Air.

There were severe storms projected for the night and I felt much better knowing our demo was under cover rather than tied down on the ramp. The FBO manager offered to keep the plane overnight at no charge and let us use the rental van for half price. They

suggested a brand new Holiday Inn Express just up the road in Bremen, GA and soon we were off to check into our stop for the night. Unfortunately it was only 1030 in the morning!

I was very disappointed that we didn't make it home but I knew in my heart that I'd made the right decision. The old saying goes "Better to be down here wishing you were up there than vice versa!" The last thing I wanted was to find myself in a bad situation with my girlfriend, possibly endangering the both of us. Plus that was the largest airport on a direct path to Shelbyville. Any other airport probably wouldn't be able to provide the shelter for our demo airplane and the local amenities may not have been as nice. That evening Clare and I drove into Carrollton, GA for a walk and a great dinner on the historic square. If you're looking for a nice place to fly out to for dinner from Shelbyville I'd recommend this airport and Carrollton, GA where we both encourage you to try out Plates on the Square.

Tuesday was scattered at 2500' and windy but manageable. We lifted off from West Georgia Regional and climbed to our cruising altitude of 6500' which was just above the clouds but where there was the least amount of headwind. Yup, our tailwind down to Sun 'n Fun and half way back was gone. In its place was a 35 kt headwind and the best ground speed I saw was 85 kts. At least it was mostly smooth! 1:45 later we touched down on terra firma in Shelbyville, 12 days after the journey started.

I really don't know how to recap the whole trip. For me it was a rollercoaster of emotions. While gone my cat Berlioz, my friend and companion for almost 15 years had to be put to sleep. We survived a tornado but lost an airplane. We had small crowds early in the week and then great crowds at the end of the show. Even though we didn't take any deposits at the show we made several great contacts which we hope will turn into sales in the very near future. Through it all though, I'm ever optimistic after Sun 'n Fun. It truly is my favorite show of the year and I look forward to it every year. Next on the agenda is Oshkosh. If you haven't made your plans yet, please do so to see us at Air Venture 2011.

Best wishes and blue skies to all!

Mark