

FIRST ANNUAL MID-AMERICA AIR FAIR

by H. Marshall Claybourn

Soaring was part of the First Annual Mid-America Air Fair held in Wichita, Kansas, on April 8th, 9th & 10th. The Kansas Soaring Association - a newly formed soaring group whose organization will be covered in a subsequent report - had two sailplanes on static display and a booth in the display area.

The Mid-America Air Fair was organized to allow commercial manufacturers of aircraft and aircraft components to display their products. The manufacturers went all out to take advantage of the opportunity. In the large Cessna hangar at Wichita Municipal Airport there were some 30 booths where the visitor to the Air Fair could inspect cut-aways, diagrams, talk with factory representatives, and obtain literature on engines, propellers, radios, ferry tanks, autopilots, flight clothing, fire extinguishers, insurance, hangars and about anything you can name for use on an airplane. Cut-away cabin sections were displayed by Beech and Cessna. Inside the hangar as well were an Aero Commander, a Bonanza, two Cessna's, a Fournier (Ercoupe), and two Pipers. Out on the spacious ramp were displayed ALL of the many models made by Aero Commander, Beech, Cessna, and Piper. The Gruman Ag-Cat, the Silvair, and two Champions were also on display. Passenger hops were provided by a Central Airliner DC-3

and by Belger Helicopter Services' Bell Model 47G2. Brantly Helicopter Corporation was represented by their Model B-2 which flew many dignitaries and prospective customers. A section was set aside for early model aircraft, homebuilts and sailplanes. Included among the early aircraft was Billy Parker's 1912 Pusher and the Gold Bug - a 1920 vintage monoplane built in Wichita.

Each day most of the aircraft on display were flown in a fly-by. The sailplanes were flown as part of the fly-by. The tows, made by a Cessna 172, were donated and flown by Mr. Norman Smyer, President of Smyer Aircraft. (Smyer Aircraft is located on Strother Field at Arkansas City, where the majority of local sailplanes are based.) Although the Kansas Soaring Association had been invited by the Fair management to fly in the daily fly-by KSA met adamant refusal of FAA and Airport personnel when flying was mentioned. Happily, this problem was solved by meeting with appropriate officials and KSA enjoyed wholehearted support of all concerned throughout the three day program.

Dave Blanton's L-K and the Carsey-Claybourn-Reeves-Schroeder 1-26 were on static display and one or both were flown each day. Those serving as pilots were "Mickey" Jensen, Harry Higgins and Marshall Claybourn. Dave Blanton, SSA State Governor for Kansas, manned the

P.A. system with an informative spiel during the flights. Although the flights were limited to 10 minutes it was possible to soar the first two days and the control tower was contacted for permission to descend and land each day. On the final day the wind got up to the Kansas spring-time standard and was blowing 30 knots with strong gusts. Several of the smaller aircraft were not flown in the fly-by. However, Harry Higgins, flying the 1-26, did a masterful job of flying making a spectator pleasing flight of some 15 minutes.

The SSA-KSA booth was manned by LeSueur, Wilson, Nichols, Householder, Nichol as well as the others previously mentioned. The Schweizer color film on one of the 1-26 Regatta's was shown, color slides of local and Tulsa activities were projected and various pieces of appropriate soaring literature were passed out.

Among the aviation notables at the Air Fair were Mr. W. T. "Bill" Piper, President of Piper Aircraft, Mr. Dwane Wallace, President of Cessna Aircraft, and Mr. Earl Green, Chairman of the Texas Aeronautics Commission. The aviation press was represented by Mr. Leighton Collins, Editor of *Air Facts*; Tony Page, Editor of *Cross-Country News*; George Haddaway, Editor of *Flight Magazine* and Norman Jacobshagen, frequent contributor to *Flying Magazine*. The latter is also an active member of the local soaring fraternity.

All in all, considerable effort was expended but the participants felt it was well worthwhile. An estimated 25 to 30,000 people attended the Air Fair. Radio, TV and newspaper coverage was excellent with the sailplanes receiving much more than their share of "air time" on local telecasts. (One news photographer now plans to visit the soaring operation for a feature story.) The officials who had been extremely "cool" to the idea of sailplane flying - especially in view of the fact the airport was not closed to normal traffic during any part of the Air Fair - ended up being familiar with sailplane operation and much more receptive to soaring. As a result of the Air Fair KSA has been invited to participate in future shows of this scheduled annual event as well as other sport shows held in Wichita. A number of persons expressed a strong interest in soaring but it will be some time before the benefits, if any, to KSA can be realistically evaluated. In any event, the crew stands ready for subsequent shows.



The KSA/SSA booth at the Mid-America Air Fair being manned by Harry Higgins, center, and Paul Wilson, right.

Photo: Dave Blanton