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Sport Expo: Closing Thoughts

By [Paul Bertorelli](#)

As I was packing up my camera gear on Sunday evening at the Sport Aviation Expo in Sebring, a volunteer rode up on his golf cart and joked about the place emptying out in a hurry. "We're like the Circus," he said, "when it's over, we're outta town!" He was right, too. At 5 p.m., the place was a windswept ghost town.

But it was hopping over the weekend, reminding me of how much I like this show. It's small, contained and intimate. You can walk right out on the flightline and right up to the runway to snap some pix and no security will come clamoring. And you can actually, like, fly real airplanes. (I did, too.)

For me, it was a pleasant culture shock, for earlier in the week I covered the big shooting and outdoor show in Las Vegas for one of our other publications. I'm quite certain it was a longer walk from my hotel room in Las Vegas than across the entire Sebring display area.

I interviewed a number of people at the show and you can see their comments in a video report elsewhere on the site. Just as you'd expect, the industry is maturing, although the inevitable shakeout has yet to occur. I'd like to say maybe it won't, but I know better.

Four interesting developments from my notes: Piper's selection of the Czech-made Sport Cruiser as its LSA entrant, a slick new model from Tecnam, Legend Aircraft's cool new amphib option and Dynon's new Skyview EFIS, which is just stunning. We've put together videos on all of these subjects.

I heard a little kvetching about the Piper decision, to the effect of asking why they're going with the Sport Cruiser instead of developing their own airplane. To me, the answer is obvious: It makes no business sense for Piper to develop and build its own LSA. In the Piper Cub days, they were everyman's airplane company—as Cessna is now—but they're not that today. Piper is a niche manufacturer which has sustained itself with a small volume of a relatively broad model line.

So it makes sense for them to buy an existing design out of the still-glutted LSA market. Whether the Sport Cruiser is the right choice remains to be seen. But it does give the company the step-up opportunity that airplane manufacturers have traditionally considered important. Cessna, of course, did this on its own with the Skycatcher.

Where to from here for the LSA market? I got the impression that manufacturers are optimistic about 2010, but not delusional. American Legend's Darin Hart told me that he thinks the market bottomed in 2009 and I hope he's right. (By the way, that Legend amphib is a thing to behold. Legend's build quality is second to none, in my view. I hope to fly it next month.)

My own view is that as the market gains experience, the airplanes look better, they have wider choices in avionics packages and accessories, the sales literature is more professional and complete—it's just looking more and more like a real industry.

The people who organize the Sport Aviation Expo deserve some of the credit for this. They put a lot of energy and investment into Expo and it shows. Put it on your calendar for next year. It's well worth the effort.