

More than the site for an annual air show, Oshkosh, Wis.,
is home to a special museum.

Wings Over Oshkosh



In the aviation world, Oshkosh is best known for its annual Fly-In Convention. The event is sponsored by the Experimental Aircraft Association, whose headquarters complex includes the more than 100,000-square-foot Air Adventure Museum, housing one of the world's largest private airplane collections. Shown here is one of EAA's two Spirit of St. Louis replicas. Both aircraft have flown in air shows, although only one still takes part in them.



In what could pass for a 1930s-vintage photo, a rare Ford Trimotor 4AT-E "Tin Goose" sits outside the museum's Pioneer Airport, adjacent to EAA headquarters. The aircraft, serial number 69, was built in 1929 and restored in 1986. Museum visitors are permitted to ride in it, taking off from the old-time airfield. Founded in Milwaukee, Wis., in the 1960s, the museum moved to its present location in 1983. It not only restores and exhibits aircraft but often maintains and flies rare and noteworthy ones, such as this Trimotor.



EAA photo

EAA photo by Carl Schuppel



The museum's display includes more than ninety historic aircraft, including replicas of the Wright Flyer and Voyager, used in 1986 by Jeana Yeager and Dick Rutan for their nonstop, round-the-world flight. Among the most interesting examples of aircraft at the museum is the restored Aerocar (left), one of a handful originally built in the 1940s as designer Molt Taylor's answer to combining flying and driving with a minimum of fuss.

EAA photo by Dick Matt

Along with five theaters, a library, and photo and art galleries, the museum offers the Eagle Hangar, a tribute to the aircraft and people who served in World War II.

Aircraft on display in this hall include a North American XP-51 Mustang and a P-64 and a Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress, as well as a Japanese fighter airplane and a Bf-109E from Germany. One of the most important aircraft on display is this beautifully restored Lockheed P-38 Lightning painted in the colors of America's all-time leading ace, Maj. Richard I. Bong, a Wisconsin native.





EAA photo by Jim Koepnick

The aerial shot above shows the sprawling EAA headquarters complex, including the museum, Eagle Hangar, and Pioneer Airport in the background. In the far background is Wittman Regional Airport, site of the association's annual fly-in. The facility is named for award-winning airplane racer and Wisconsin native, S. J. "Steve" Wittman, whose racing airplanes are on display at the museum. Other types of specialized aircraft, such as the Pitts S-2 "Big Stinker" used for air show aerobatics, and such homebuilts as the Lancair 200 and the Bede BD-5 "Micro" have their own sections in the museum.

Paul H. Poberezny, an Army Air Forces and Air National Guard pilot who retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1970, founded EAA with his friends in 1953 to encourage amateur aircraft builders and restorers. What began as a neighborhood gathering to exchange ideas is now an organization with more than 160,000 members.



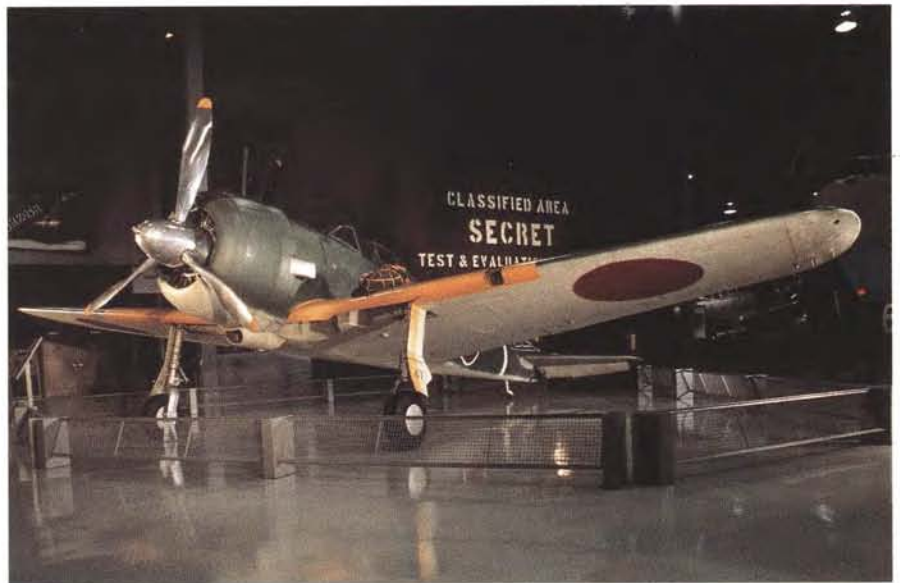
EAA photo by Mike Steinke

Many of the museum's restored aircraft are regulars on the air show circuit. Above, even the founder keeps a hand in, as Mr. Poberezny flies a P-51 Mustang.



Constructed with "nonstrategic" building skills and crafted from molded plywood, the de Havilland Mosquito was very maneuverable and successful in many roles, from night fighting to photo-reconnaissance. The British-built light bomber is one of a dozen World War II-era airplanes on display at any given time in the Eagle Hangar, the museum's most popular wing. In describing this hall, EAA Executive Vice President Gregory J. Anderson says, "The Eagle Hangar collection presents the factual and inspirational context of ordinary individuals who did extraordinary things, from the home front to the front lines around the world."

This rare Japanese Nakajima Ki-43 "Oscar" is among the aircraft used by America's World War II adversaries on display in the Eagle Hangar. The fighter represented a level of sophistication in aircraft design that the Allies were not prepared for in the war's early days.



Many of the museum's 150,000 annual visitors fly in for a visit, so it's not uncommon to see a lineup of several types of aircraft at nearby Wittman Regional Airport. Activity at the airfield peaks when more than 800,000 visitors gather at Oshkosh for the annual Fly-In Convention. The aircraft, displays, pavilions, workshops, and "fly" market that make up this show spread out over 1,400 acres.



EAA photo

When not on national tours, the B-17G Aluminum Overcast is one of the highlights of the Eagle Hangar. Restoration of such classics is the museum's backbone and requires a great effort from more than a dozen aircraft technicians, aviation students, and volunteers. EAA's Aviation Foundation has two restoration areas, one within the museum and another for larger airplanes at Wittman Airport. The aircraft arrive in all kinds of condition—from pristine to parts shipped in crates. Some are restored to flying status, others for permanent museum display. Those that fly give today's aviation devotees a chance to hear history in the drone of four 1,000-horsepower radial engines.



EAA photo by Steve Buss

In displaying the many facets of the flying machine's development, EAA's Air Adventure Museum offers insight into an invention of monumental importance that continues to inspire and challenge. ■