

LAKEATHON 2005: Lake owners gather in Florida to catch up on the latest news and have a little fun

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What do you get when 200 Lake owners from all over the world gather in one place? A celebration of the pure fun of water flying.

Following a 17-year-old tradition, the Lake Flyers Club held its annual Lakeathon in Winter Haven, Florida, earlier this month.

The event drew Lake owners of every stripe, from the LA4-180 up to the LA 270 Turbo Seafury. They flew in from Australia, Canada, Brazil, Germany, Finland, Austria and, of course, all across the United States — a fitting tribute by loyal devotees to this cult airplane.

The event gave Lake owners a chance to learn the latest news in the battle for Lake Aircraft. The company was sold to LanShe Aerospace a few years ago, but a bitter court battle, plus last season's hurricanes, put LanShe out of business.

Armand Rivard, former president and owner of Lake Aircraft, told the Lakeathon crowd that the courts have returned the LanShe assets to him. (Calls to Wadi Rahim, LanShe's owner, were not returned, while his lawyers would not comment on the status of the court case.)

Rivard noted that he has about \$1 million worth of Lake parts for sale to support the fleet. He added it's unlikely he will start manufacturing Lakes again.

"I'm 70 years old now and I just

want to go fishing," he said. "But I have four different investors interested in buying the inventory and manufacturing rights."

Meanwhile, Lake owners soon will have another source for parts. Elton Townsend, president of Lake Central Air Service in Canada, described his ongoing venture to manufacture certified Lake parts (see separate story on page 37). Townsend, who has been in business since 1964 providing training, service, refurbishment and sales of Lakes, estimates that concerns over the availability of parts has led to a decrease of 2% to 3% in the value of used Lakes.

Other speakers at the fly-in included the FAA's Ken Lindsay, who gave a talk on the Seawings program, a nautical offshoot of the Wings program. Well-known Lake expert, Paul Furnee, president of Aircraft Innovation and Repair in Winter Haven, addressed problems with the Lake fuel system and what to do about them, while Harry Shannon, president of Amphibians Plus at Bartow Municipal Airport, drew a large crowd to his maintenance seminar.

One of the more lively parts of the program has always been a panel discussion between the audience and veteran Lake flight instructors concerning techniques, flight maneuvers and do's and don't's. This year was no different. Paul Array, a Lake owner and sales manager for SeaStar Aircraft, spoke on the responsibilities of the pilot-in-command.

Rounding out the program were



Photo by J. Douglas Hinton

SHARING RAMP SPACE: Two of the many Lake aircraft flown into Central Florida earlier this month for the Lake Flyers Club's annual Lakeathon. The event attracted 200 people from around the world.

talks by two insurance professionals, followed by Mike Volk of the Seaplane Pilots Association, who discussed the state of water flying in the U.S.

Of course, it wasn't all talk. Afternoons were devoted to the pure fun of water flying to many of Central Florida's lakes.

The club has about 450 members, according to Marc Rodstein, who took over the presidency five years ago when Bill Goddard's health failed. Initial membership fee is \$88, with an

annual renewal fee of \$58. "For that, you get our newsletter, which comes out every other month, and access to our web forum, which is sort of like a chat room," Rodstein explained. "Owners can ask questions, describe problems, get advice and share experiences with other members. It's a very active forum."

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