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## Expo and Fly-In attracts diverse sets of aircraft



**USAF pilot trainers Matt Frasse and Conor Murphy flew from Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi to the Cross City airport to show off the United States Air Force's T-6A trainer used to train rookie pilots.**

### Story and Photos

**By Terry Witt, Senior Staff Writer © April 16, 2017 at 2:57 p.m.**

**CROSS CITY AIRPORT** -- The Dixie County Chamber of Commerce's Fly-in and Expo attracted hundreds of visitors to the Cross City Airport on Saturday (April 15) to view about 50 aircraft, watch an aerobatic air show, walk through an antique car exhibition and view the crafts and services of people from Dixie County.

Dixie County Chamber of Commerce President Carol West said the event attracted 84 vendors this year.

The expo and fly-in began four years ago as a smaller show that has grown into something much bigger, she said. The airport parking lot was filled to capacity.

"It started as a business expo," President West said. "There are a lot of things made and services provided in Cross City and we wanted to show them off. The organizers added an air show because the event was taking place at an airport."

The air fly-in took place on a portion of the 5,100-foot runway. People were permitted to mingle with the pilots and ask about their background and obtain information about the airplanes.

United States Air Force trainers Conor Murphy, 29, and Matt Frasse, 25, flew to the show from Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi. They arrived in T-6A, the airplane used by the Air Force and all the military services to train beginner pilots.

The T-6A has a jet engine with a propeller. The flight to Cross City took two hours. The airplane can fly at 320 miles per hour and is capable of flying aerobatic maneuvers. The pilots

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evaluate the rookies they train and rate their flying skills. The most talented flyers are often directed to jet training and later jet fighter training.



**Lake City pilot Ron Wilson shows off his experimental Cosy aircraft with rear propulsion. He built the aircraft himself.**

On the private side, Ron Wilson of Lake City brought his experimental aircraft known as a Cosy to the fly-in. The aircraft propeller is at the rear and the plane can fly 1,000 miles at a top speed of 185 miles per hour.

The Cosy is similar to the plane that crashed and claimed the life of singer John Denver. The singer's plane was narrower than Wilson's. Denver was seated in the pilot's seat, but the passenger area behind him was vacant. Investigators can never be certain what caused the violent crash but they believe Denver may have noticed he was running short of fuel and turned to flick a fuel tank switch, causing the experimental aircraft to dive into Monterey Bay off of the California coast.

Wilson said he built his aircraft over period of seven years and started flying it in 1999. The airplane has a front passenger seat next to his pilot seat and can accommodate a small passenger or luggage behind him.

"I love this airplane. The only thing I don't like about it, is that it takes longer to get into the air," he said.

Wilson said the idea of a rear propeller is nothing new. The Wright Brothers, who are credited with successfully flying the first aircraft in the history of aviation, used a rear propeller on their airplane, according to Wilson.

One of the most popular exhibits at the fly-in was the radio-controlled miniature aircraft operated and exhibited by Kenneth Bell of Fanning Springs. He said his friends got him interested in the hobby and he now has 200 airplanes.

He said he sometimes is called upon to rescue radio-controlled airplanes from the tops of trees after they crash. He said the boom truck used in his tree service comes in handy for plucking downed aircraft from treetops. He calls his boom trucks "airplane removal trucks."

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**John Rivers takes a look at a radio controlled replica of a World War II observation aircraft. The owner, Kenneth Bell, is not shown. He owns 200 radio-controlled aircraft.**

“Since they know I’m into the planes and I have a tree service I get a lot of calls,” Bell said.

His favorite radio-controlled airplane is the replica of Pawnee crop duster that can fly at 75 miles per hour. The airplane cost him \$5,000. The L-4 Grasshopper, a replica of a World War II observation aircraft cost \$10,000.

Resident John Rivers was looking at Bell’s replica of the World War II airplane when he commented about losing his radio controlled aircraft in a tree a day earlier. He said the radio-controlled aircraft made a perfect landing in the treetop and he was able to retrieve it himself.

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**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pilot and biologist Jim Wortham stands next to a Kodiak aircraft used for low level aerial surveys of wild animals.**

An aircraft used by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for conducting aerial surveys of wild animals and their habitats captured considerable attention at the fly-in, perhaps because of the large water floats and the sheer size of the aircraft. The massive Kodiak aircraft can fly as slow as 50 knots (57.6 miles per hour) and can land on water.

Pilot Jim Wortham, a biologist with a Master's degree in water fowl ecology, said the aircraft is being equipped with vertical cameras that photograph the animals below as he flies over them. He houses the aircraft at the Williston Municipal Airport.

He said USFWS has 17 professional pilots who hold master's or doctoral degrees in biology and other sciences. The aircraft is equipped with retractable landing wheels. Wortham said the wheels are pulled up when he is using the floats for a water landing.