



2009 SWEEPSTAKES

LAUNCH OF AN ALL-NEW SWEEPSTAKES



On the road

Our SR22 takes on varied new missions

BY DAVE HIRSCHMAN

It's flown a team of conservationists over the most rugged and remote portions of the Appalachian Mountains; swooped in on a sun-splashed rally to help save historic Robertson Airfield in Connecticut; dropped in on AOPA's birthplace—Wings Field in Pennsylvania—and showed off its flashy exterior design for photos.

And that was just one week.

The AOPA 2009 Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes SR22 is a tremendously potent and versatile tool, and it's going to be busy this year fulfilling its critical mission of helping to build the general aviation pilot population. Unlike previous AOPA sweepstakes aircraft, the Let's Go Flying SR22 isn't a restoration project. It's a young, sound, technologically advanced aircraft built in 2005. AOPA plans to use



The Let's Go Flying Sweepstakes SR22 helped build support among Connecticut voters to preserve formerly endangered Robertson Field, the state's oldest airport.



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the airplane for a broad range of aerial activities that highlight the practicality and exciting new possibilities that GA offers.

A last-minute substitution

We had planned to bring another aircraft on the flight to Asheville, North Carolina, to fly a team of conservationists from the Wilderness Society on an aerial survey of the southern Appalachian Mountains. (A story and photographs from a spectacular flight over some of the most rugged, remote, and highest elevations will appear soon in *AOPA Pilot* magazine.)

The Let's Go Flying SR22 had the speed, range, and IFR capabilities to perform the cross-country portions of the flight, and its airframe parachute could enhance the safety of flying at relatively

low altitudes above such inaccessible and inhospitable terrain. The Cirrus also turned out to be a smooth, stable photo platform with enough power to carry four people over the jagged hills and through the narrow valleys.

Wings Field

The next stop for the SR22 was Wings Field, the 1939 birthplace of AOPA. With *AOPA Pilot* Managing Editor Julie Walker and Rose, we made the trip from Frederick, Maryland, to suburban Philadelphia in 40 minutes. There, the airplane was welcomed by a dozen or so GA pilots who immediately recognized its distinctive exterior graphics (see "America's Airports: Wings Field" May *AOPA Pilot*).

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people respond in very favorable and enthusiastic ways."

While in the area, the Let's Go Flying SR22 stopped by nearby Penn Avionics to add satellite weather to its Avidyne glass-panel displays. The avionics suite now has the latest software, and its dual Garmin 430W GPS system is fully capable of WAAS approaches.

Threatened airport

The week's last mission for the Let's Go Flying SR22 was critically important—and a new use for an AOPA Sweepstakes aircraft.

Robertson Field, a gem of a GA airport outside Hartford, Connecticut, was threatened with closure (see "First Fly-Out," below). The SR22 was the centerpiece of an airport rally organized by AOPA Airport Support Network volunteer

First fly-out

Children stood on the wings and peered inside the open doors for their first close look at a general aviation aircraft. Veteran fliers took note of the modern avionics, leather seats, and airframe parachute.

The Let's Go Flying SR22 made the trip from its home base in Frederick, Maryland, to Plainville, Connecticut's Robertson Field (4B8) on March 21, where it took center stage at an open house designed to show Plainville residents the types of aircraft and future economic benefits they can expect by preserving the airport. Voters decided that the state's oldest airport, established in 1911, will remain an active airport and not be sold for real estate development.

Voters decided by a two-to-one margin that Plainville will buy the airfield. Previous studies determined the airport and its associated businesses will run a surplus and bring new businesses to the area. Federal and state governments have offered to pay the vast majority of the acquisition costs as long as the facility remains part of the nation's air transportation system.

More than 2,000 people attended Robertson Airfield's open house. It also was one of the first stops on a busy year-long schedule for the Let's Go Flying SR22. The airplane is the centerpiece of AOPA's Let's Go Flying campaign, an ongoing project meant to strengthen general aviation by expanding the U.S. pilot population.

Neal Witkin, a Connecticut volunteer for AOPA's Airport Support Network, helped organize the open house at Robertson Airfield, where more than 100 people took their first flights in GA airplanes.

"It was a great turnout," Witkin said, "and all had a chance to see the Let's Go Flying airplane up close. With great appreciation and heartfelt thanks, I thank you for your dedication to saving this general aviation airport." —DH

The Let's Go Flying SR22 was a big hit among seasoned aviators as well as children who were thrilled with the modern avionics and wow-factor of the most technologically advanced aircraft AOPA has ever offered in its annual sweepstakes.



Neal Witkin that drew more than 2,000 visitors on a cool, sunny spring day.

On March 31, voters in Plainville, Connecticut, were scheduled to decide whether the town should pay \$96,000 to buy the airfield and adjoining property (federal and state governments would provide the rest of the \$7.7 million purchase price), or sell it to land developers. Independent consultants projected current and future businesses would help run the airport at a surplus, and that it would enhance economic development opportunities in the area.

Greg Pecoraro, AOPA vice president for regional affairs, came along on the 90-minute flight to Robertson Field and said the Let's Go Flying SR22's presence was meant as a show of support for the airport and its defenders. "It's a tangible way for AOPA to support the people fighting to preserve this jewel of an airport," Pecoraro said. "It also lets voters see and touch the kind of aircraft that will expand economic opportunities here. We can provide real information on which they can base their important decision."

The SR22 didn't encounter a single cloud on the day trip to Robertson Field, and the views up and down the East Coast, past the New York skyline, and over Long Island Sound were spectacular.

Coming up

The next stops for the Let's Go Flying SR22 are more traditional airshow locations where it will be seen by large numbers of visitors—both pilots and prospective pilots alike. The airplane had a prominent place at the AOPA display at Sun 'n Fun in Lakeland, Florida. And it will drop in on other major gatherings throughout the year, including AirVenture Oshkosh 2009 and AOPA's Aviation Summit in Tampa, Florida, November 5 through 7.

All AOPA members are automatically entered into the annual sweepstakes to win the Let's Go Flying SR22, and all have an opportunity to win this extraordinarily capable and just plain fun aircraft. AOPA will take great care of it until then.

And in accordance with philanthropist J. Lloyd Huck's wishes, we'll use the airplane he generously donated to reach out in creative ways and expand the U.S. pilot population so that future fliers will be able to enjoy the same freedoms we know and cherish.

AOPA

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