

Outland Airport welcomes KR gathering

Enthusiasts trade tips on their home-built planes on Saturday

BY TIM JOHNSON

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Jeanette Rand of Huntington Beach, Calif., is keeping alive the craft her husband, Ken, began decades ago when he built his first hand-made airplane in 1972.

Rand, originally from Marion, was on hand Saturday at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport for the seventh annual KR gathering, where more than 100 owners, builders, and fans of the experimental aircraft visited from across the country and around the world to trade tips, swap stories and share their love of the small aircraft that are all based on Ken Rand's original design.

"He always wanted to fly," Jeanette Rand said. "In 1968 or so we had a house full of kids and no money. He couldn't buy a commercial air-

plane, so he and his partner designed and made their own."

Ken Rand, who was killed in his own KR airplane in a crash in 1979, shared his design with the world, selling the plans to anyone with the time, patience and money to build his or her own. The planes can be built for as low as \$5,000, though the average cost is between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

"Over the years we have sold over 15,000 sets of plans, and the planes are flying all over the world," Jeanette Rand said.

About a dozen of the roughly 100-horsepower planes were parked at the airport over the weekend for the annual gathering, and no two were exactly alike. KR builders all draw from the same basic plans, but each individual plane can vary in the shape of its cockpit and the type of engine it uses.

Daniel Heath of Lexington, S.C., became interested in KR aircraft in the mid-1980s, when he read an article in *Mechanics Illustrated* about an airplane that could be

built at home. Heath decided to get a pilot's license and then purchased a "90-percent complete" KR plane.

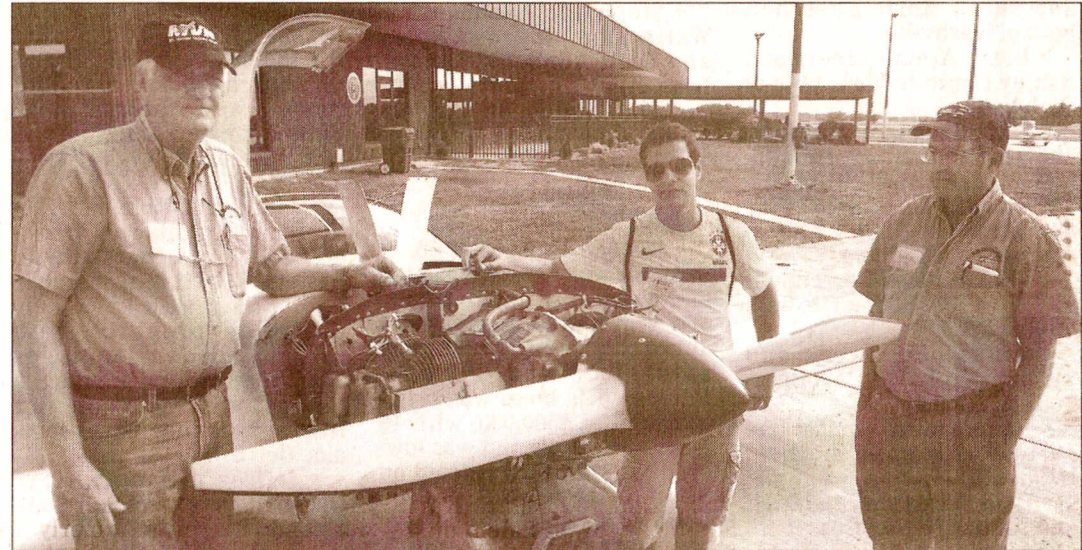
"It was 90-percent complete, 90 percent still to go," he said with a smile.

It takes about 1,000 hours to complete a KR airplane from the ground up, no small task for the average builder. But the finished product, Heath said, is worth the effort.

"They're very sporty. They're inexpensive to fly," he said. "They're a thrill to handle. All you have to do is think what you want to do, and the plane will do it. It looks out for its pilot."

The KR gathering drew a couple from Norway this year as well as an exchange student from Brazil. Past gatherings have seen KR enthusiasts from Germany, New Zealand and Czechoslovakia.

Outland Airport continues to host the event, the enthusiasts said, because of the warm welcome they receive from its event volunteers as well as its well-run facilities, conference rooms for KR dis-



Sentinel Photo/TIM JOHNSON

KR Crowd — Larry Flesner of Cartersville, LEFT, stands next to the uncovered engine of his KR2 home-assembled plane at the seventh annual KR gathering on Saturday at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. Also pictured are KR enthusiasts Pedro Cupelli of Brazil, MIDDLE, and Daniel Heath of Lexington, S.C.

cussion forums and its in-house restaurant, which changed this year to Wilkey's Cafe.

Some visitors to the event even camped at the airport for the weekend.

"You can't ask for better facilities," Heath said. "But I think the thing that swayed everybody more than anything was the support from the local community."

Volunteer Karen Spieth

was happy to agree.

"We have the best facilities, and we have the best people," she said. "And we try to do the best we can for the KR people."

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