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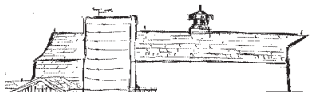

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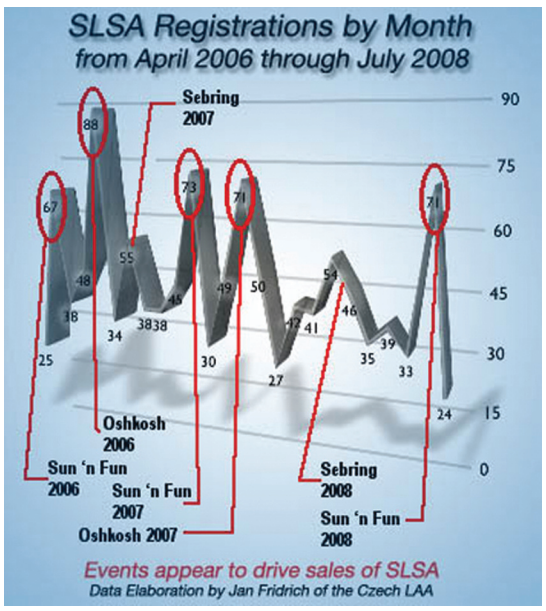
LSA Over the Years; Observing Trends

The LSA industry has done well to put more than 1,400 new airplanes in American skies in approximately three years. And we have yet to add deliveries of big companies like Cessna SkyCatcher, Cirrus SRS, Icon A5 and more. Light Sport Aircraft burst on the aviation scene in April 2005. By the end of that year, less than 50 had been registered with FAA. But in 2006, 2007, and so far in 2008, growth has been brisk, if somewhat erratic.



It may seem a bit early to be blogging about an "historical perspective" on LSA, but looking at the trend line illustrates something I find fascinating. Sales of recreational-class flying machines closely track the major shows at which they're exhibited: Sebring, Sun 'n Fun, and Oshkosh. AOPA's Expo also has an influence but it is less demonstrable than the other three. Also, you can easily see the effect of the 2008 U.S. economic slow down that has afflicted general aviation as well as light sport aviation. (Even bizjets may begin to show this effect, according to experts, as their backlogs mean present day strong deliveries were from orders placed in the economic high times of 2005. Consumers of LSA buy them for fun flying as well as regional trips, so when the economy gets shaky, many pull back until they have a clearer view of what's ahead. The good news is that current LSA businesses are rapidly building infrastructure check the growth in our FIRM List as an example and more new SLSA models are still in development.

Martin Jetpack as a Part 103 Ultralight

While I can envision a military interest in such a machine perhaps even considering it a bargain, sport flying use is likely to be limited by the six-figure price tag. Jetpack comes with a BRS parachute and "the goal is to provide impact protection from 30 feet high." The Martin Jetpack flew at Oshkosh in a carefully controlled environment. Two people held special "training wheel" grips on each side and Jetpack never lifted more than a couple feet off the ground. If you weren't in the front row of the airshow demonstration you might have missed the flight (although not the noise). But Jetpack did fly and can qualify as a Part 103 ultralight, according to New Zealand developer Glenn Martin. Besides being the most compact Ultralight Vehicle at 5 x 5 x 5 feet, it's probably the most expensive at 100,000. Martin said he has been working on the Jetpack for 30 years also developing a 200 hp two stroke piston engine that pumps air through ducted fans to adjustable steering vanes to control flight. Jetpack specs A Jetpack pilot controls pitch and roll with the left joystick. A right stick is both a twist grip throttle and pivoting yaw control. The vehicle is built significantly from carbon fiber, weighs 250 pounds empty, carries five gallons of fuel, and while burning 10 gph, can fly about 30 miles at 63 mph, the company indicated. The non aviation media loved the Jetpack, publishing nearly 1,000 TV stories in the days after its debut at Oshkosh.

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