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## Ladies Love Taildraggers

### An unconventional fly-in for conventional-gear pilots

By Steve Schapiro, Senior Editor, EAA 1018168

**August 25, 2011** – The second annual Ladies Love Taildraggers Fly-In August 12-14 was anything but conventional – unless you're referring to the landing gear. For three days the sky over Moraine Air Park in Dayton, Ohio, was buzzing with aircraft – Wacos, Citabrias, Cubs, Cessna taildraggers, and even a "nosedragger" or two were sighted – while the hangar was full of pilots sharing flying stories with anyone who would listen.

"Most fly-ins you go to people fly in, they tie their airplane down, and they never move. This place is completely different," said event founder Judy Birchler, EAA 1041248. "These people love to fly and they're all tailwheel airplanes. Everybody goes out every evening, and all the formation fly-bys, all the people zooming down the runway, people taking rides, everybody's so generous. If they have an airplane they are generous sharing it with other people."

The fly-in attracted nearly 50 aircraft and 300 people from as far as Alabama, Tennessee, and Washington, according to Andy Heins, EAA 380123, who hosted the event with his wife, Susan Theodorelos, EAA 1056895.

The award for the longest distance flown went to Summer Martell and her friend Chrissy Bishop, who made the journey from Port Townsend, Washington – a round trip of 3,400 miles – in a 1931 Student Prince biplane. (Read the blog about her trip [here](#).) Only six Student Prince biplanes were produced and three are still flying. Summer learned to fly in this plane as a teenager and has owned it since she was 17.

Now a professional pilot and designated flight examiner, Summer was the perfect role model for the many young women here. Among them was 11-year-old Sophia Lucas, EAA 1063427, wearing a pink T-shirt that read, "Silly boys, airplanes are for girls!" She flew with Summer and even logged some flight time in the Student Prince.

Allison Driver, 15, did all the flight planning and flying from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, with her granddad, Ernie Betancourt, EAA 145703, who is teaching her how to fly in his Citabria Explorer. Sisters Kaelin, 16, and Megan King, 15, drove an hour and half from Dublin, Ohio, just to attend. Kaelin, EAA 636184, wants to be an aeronautical engineer and fighter pilot, while Megan, EAA 636185, wants a career in math and doesn't want to fly for a living even though she loves it. "It's what I do," she said. "I fly."

"Women who fly taildraggers are passionate about it," Birchler said. "They know they are doing something really special. A taildragger is not necessarily an easy airplane to fly. So they know already that they are in a special little group of people."

The local Women in Aviation chapter held its meeting as part of the fly-in and EAA Chapter 48 held a Young Eagles rally, led by the chapter's Young Eagles coordinator, Betty Darst, EAA 832505. Young Eagles Co-Chairman Jeff Skiles, EAA 336120, flew his Cabin Waco to the fly-in and spent some time talking the aspiring pilots.

All the flying attracted the attention of the airport neighbors. "Local people came out and saw something going on and that was another nice thing," Birchler said. "Two different families came out that happened to have women in the group that were really, really interested in flying." So Birchler took them around and took them up in her RANS S-7.

She started the Ladies Love Taildraggers group about three years ago. "I just wanted a couple of gals to go out and fly tailwheels with," she said. She created a [website](#) and sent it to a few people and EAA chapters. She had 60 taildraggers registered overnight.



Susan Theodorelos in her Waco RNF leads a formation with Summer Martell in her Student Prince.



Chrissy Bishop hand props Summer Martell's 1931 Student Prince before Summer takes 11-year-old Sophia Lucas for a flight.



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While she isn't sure what the total registration numbers currently are, what Birchler expected to be only a regional group now includes women from Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, South Africa, and several other countries.

"It's about the flying and the fellowship," said Donna Guerin, who came to the fly-in from Alabama in her Piper J-5. "It's been a great weekend."