

Evektor SportStar: A Big Step Up

There are plenty of motivators to move into a new LSA: that “new airplane smell,” increased performance, the need for a more-comfortable craft, the 2008 deadline for 2-place ultralight conversion, or even to make money. In the factory-built Light Sport Aircraft (S-LSA) world, a handful of machines are already becoming market leaders. The first certified S-LSA, the first-delivered LSA, and the first LSA in a flight school is a top contender: the Evektor SportStar.

The SportStar is a close cousin to the (UK certified) Evektor Harmony, but with a world of comfort and performance improvements for the US market. The certified-world heritage and experience of the company clearly helped the certification process of the SportStar. It was certified (and the first Evektor was delivered) in April, 2005, to a then-92-year-old engineer. [Note: On his first anniversary (during Sun 'n Fun '06) he had logged some 125 hours in his baby.]

The biggest impact Evektor has had so far, though, has been in the field of flight training. The company's first customer flight center (St

Charles Flying Service, St Charles, MO) booked its original SportStar well over 100 hours a month, and received its second in September. Between the two airplanes, they had run over 1000 training hours, as winter turned to spring.

The advantages to flight schools cover a lot of bases: they can offer a new, modern airplane to train both Sport Pilots and Private Pilots. (In fact, it's possible to option up a SportStar to use as an IFR trainer.) With the low maintenance of a new aircraft, high utilization, and an (auto gas) fuel burn under 4 gph, schools are finding that LSAs can replace aging spam cans for training and rental.

That high utilization bodes well for the S-LSA's future value, too. The machines are in high demand for private transportation, and their modern technology and economy of operation should make them worth plenty in the long run, as well.

Get Pilots Into the Airplane

From Evektor's perspective, early positioning in flight schools is a help to marketing and sales. A prospect can actually fly an Evektor, work toward his license in one, build skills in one. In the present phase of S-LSA (the ramp-up of the industry), it isn't easy to see an LSA that is available to fly, and having Evektors positioned around the country lets prospects experience the real thing, rather than relying on sales literature and ogling airplanes at shows. Jeff Conrad, President of Evektor America, said, “That [having SportStars in schools and available for rental] is one good way to have as many people fly as possible, in a short time. As they get their pilot training, they can think about what they will want to fly when they're certificated. We'll be ready for them.”

Experienced Company

Evektor's SportStar comes from a 35-year-old, established company that has over 500 airplanes

by Tim Kern

Below: The SportStar II at Sun 'n Fun. photo: UltraFlight staff.



flying in 42 countries. There are tens of thousands of flight hours on the fleet, without a single structural AD in the bunch. In other words, they have a habit of getting things right the first time.

That doesn't mean there haven't been improvements. In fact, since the first SportStars were delivered, an astute observer would note a new tail skid (great for training!), improved ventilation, and an improved canopy system, along with a couple detail improvements that are included in all new SportStars.

The 'Three-Legged Stool of Success'

Evektor believes that a product, no matter how well-built, won't sell itself. It has invested heavily in marketing and marketing training, and is near-obsessive on supplying customer support and building an experienced and trained team. "By September," Conrad said, "we'll have 35 airplanes in the field. All our Sales Center personnel will go to the factory, to see the airplane in pieces, to understand what each part, each assembly, contributes to the whole. Having a wonderful product is great, but having customer loyalty is *critical*. They need to be not only satisfied with the airplane, but also delighted with our support." Product, marketing,

support: That's Evektor's over-riding plan, at every stage of rollout.

Field Support: Evektor Flight Centers

Evektor America has already set up six SportStar Flight Centers where you can take lessons in an Evektor; some also will rent you a SportStar, so you can fly around a bit, getting used to the airplane, as you make your future buying decision. (Using the Evektors as rentals has proven to be a good business for those centers, as they can command wet rental fees equivalent to a 172's – not expensive for the renters – and the operating costs are much lower.)

Field Support: Evektor Sales Centers

Evektor America has also set up several SportStar Sales Centers, with more areas slated for coverage. There, a prospect may see the airplane, get all his questions answered, pick colors and options and (at some locations) take his ground school and the knowledge test, soon graduating to his own airplane. Product knowledge and service, training and support, parts and advice – all are available from a dedicated team of professionals. That is Conrad's plan, and he's sticking to it.



Right: The SportStar in flight. photo: Evektor America

Jim Sweeney, at the Beloit (WI) sales center, said, "Flight training, both ground and air, is a key to customer service. You're not just buying an airplane, and getting left on your own."

Conrad continued, "We visualize building a complete pilot curriculum (and we're well along on it), a branded pilot training program, to have a complete package for the centers. It's, 'Here's what you need to know to operate in the black.'" His plan: "Get the center personnel into the airplane, have them fall in love with it, and train them so the love becomes contagious." Conrad's plan includes a dozen Evektor Sales Centers by the end of the year. "The bigger the base, the better the marketing opportunities." Even so, Conrad warned, "Quality trumps quantity every time, and that's our plan."

The Evektor Sales Centers maintain a regional focus – Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, Rocky Mountains, Pacific Southwest, and so on. Texas is handled from Evektor America's headquarters in Kerrville (TX). The latest locations are listed at www.EvektorAmerica.com/wheretobuy.html. Find yours by rolling your mouse over your state.

Making Money in Aviation

St Charles is a big school, with 30 airplanes, and they didn't buy the Evektor on its looks alone. Dennis Bampton, a CPA, runs the school, and he has a high utilization rate, a significant factor in his profitability. He trains pilots (both Sport and Private) in his Evektors, and he also rents the airplane for \$78 (about the same as his 172s). People like to fly it. "The schools," Conrad noted, "look at the SportStar not just for LSA, but as primary trainers."

As a PT, the SportStar is well-designed, incorporating dual toe brakes, a feature missing on many LSAs. Further a SportStar can be optioned-up to be legal for night VFR and even as an IFR trainer, though the company notes that "It's not designed to be a true IFR aircraft."

Partnerships, too, seem easy to form. Get the "horse" first; don't scurry around looking for partners, when they haven't even seen the machine: Tim Fiedler, who owns the Evektor Sales Center in Beloit (WI), said, "Buy the airplane, and the partners will come. Best of all, you'll have the airplane just the way *you* like it."

John Calla, who runs the Evektor Sales Center in Thomasville (PA), notes that financing can be arranged for 7, 10, or 15 years, depending on the airplane's usage. "It has those qualities of high insurability and high sales velocity, which translate into high residual value down the road."

He sensibly observed, though, that buyers should, "Look at the leaseback option from the tax angle and as a subsidy to ownership, but don't count on the leaseback to be your big money-maker."

Affordable Insurance and Maintenance Start With Design and Materials

Insurance, too, is easy to obtain for an Evektor. Its conventional, all-metal construction is not only rugged, it's easy to fix, and mechanics aren't afraid to touch it, because its components, design, and materials are familiar to them.

The only area where US mechanics may not be familiar with the Evektor is the propulsion. That is a common thread among LSAs, as so many use the Rotax engines. [The SportStar uses the 100hp 912 ULS.] On the other hand, Rotax training and support will soon allow most rebuilds to be performed at the centers. The 3-blade propeller has individually replaceable blades, and Kerrville always has at least one complete (Woodcomp Klassic) prop on hand, in case of an AOG (Airplane on the Ground) situation.

The Rotax is providing better-than-book fuel consumption numbers, as well. Evektor's schools are reporting (mogas) usage well under 4gph. [If you keep track of your fuel purchases, your accountant may be able to back out the road taxes, too, reducing the actual cost of even the car gas by 20% or more.]

On the Ramp

The Evektor draws crowds. Not only does it represent a whole new breed of airplanes, it seems particularly personalize-able (if that's a word). Fiedler says, "Look, it's side-by-side friendly, comfortable, and roomy. The colors you paint it make a difference, too: red, white and blue is 'sporty;' green and gold, that's 'elegant.'" Its design is conventional but unmistakably new, and its compact LSA size makes it easy to handle on the ground and in the hangar. Besides all that comfort and competence, Sweeney has noticed, "The women all think it's cute."

More information:

www.EvektorAmerica.com

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