



22nd Annual Challenger Winter Rendezvous gets 'two thumbs up' from 2012 participants

By Bryan Quickmire

Fabulous! Marvelous! Glorious! These are the words being used to describe the Challenger Winter Rendezvous at Chateau Montebello which was held Feb. 3-5.

Our theme of Snow 'n Fun celebrates the rites of Canadian winter and the unique opportunities it provides for the right airplane. There was white snow, blue sky, yellow sun and a rainbow of multicoloured Challengers on skis.

No less than 90 aircraft cavorted on and above the frozen river and several hundred people alternated between the aerial action outside and the amazing ambiance inside where presentations ran throughout the day.

The Place - The People - The Planes

Chateau Montebello is located on the Ottawa River midway between Ottawa and Montreal. Originally built as a private retreat for the pecunious and powerful this is the world's largest and most spectacular log structure. For many years Chateau Montebello was a jewel in the CP Hotels crown along with their other grand chateaux across Canada. Now it is operated by the equally prestigious Fairmont Hotels.

Activities range from cross-country skiing and dog sledding to an indoor Olympic pool and a brand new spa. Chateau Montebello has been the venue for the G-7 and other such gatherings of world leaders. What better choice for ultralight enthusiasts than a ultradecadent yet ultracasual world class venue!

Challenger owners, wannabes and fans are known for their enthusiasm for their favourite ultralight. In 2012, the Canadians in attendance ranged from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island. Farthest south was a Canadian couple who live in the Cayman Islands.

Nine U.S. states were represented with Arizona and Florida being the most distant. COPA director Frank Hofmann invited three commissioners from the Interna-

tional Civil Aviation Organization to experience the freedom of flying on skis from a frozen river. These VIP's came from Australia and Singapore so it may well have been the first time they had seen snow!

Stars of the show were three dozen Challengers ranging from two 1980's era Legacy square nose specimens through numerous Classic Challengers to two brand new Light Sport models. Pretty much every permutation and combination of Challenger airframe and engine, option and accessory imaginable could be found in front of the chateau.

For many years the Challenger Winter Rendezvous was a secret society open only to the privileged elite. In recent times we have invited all aviation enthusiasts to join us in the rites of winter. Every year more and more airplanes come to frolic and fraternize with us. This year we enjoyed the company of several dozen classic taildraggers and a smattering of helicopters and trikes.

Vintage Wings sent a Tiger Moth, Cornell and Harvard to kick off their Yellow Wings tour of Eastern Canada. The snow was too deep and rutted to risk landing on wheels however their inspection passes

gave the crowd a close up look at a very significant aspect of our aviation history.

A picture is worth a thousand words so we share with you images courtesy of aviation photographers Jean-Pierre Bonin, Ben Foisy, Bill Fawcett and Pierre Langlois. Each year these gentlemen bring their considerable talents to record our event for posterity.

The Big Picture

The Challenger Winter Rendezvous has become a three day event for many attendees. Friday evening there were numerous people enjoying libations around the three-story six-sided granite fireplace while fourteen Challengers were parked outside for the night. Challengers land on the frozen river and taxi into the marina where they fit nicely in the two-boat berths which have docking cleats for tie downs.

During the day on Saturday there are a variety of informative and interesting ses-

sions presented inside. Saturday evening is the banquet - a sumptuous buffet dinner followed by awards and a feature presentation.

Sunday morning is the chateau's famous five star breakfast buffet after which most people depart for home by land or air while a few stay to enjoy the resort.

Saturday is the peak of the action with still more people and planes arriving. The Challengers stay overnight for the banquet, while many of the non-Challengers head back to their hangars before dark.

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At left:
The 2012 Challenger Winter Rendezvous poster. Courtesy Dave O'Malley

Top photo:
Mike Prescott in Sea Imp (C-IMMP) cleared to start engine in front of Chateau Montebello.

At left:
Challengers park in the marina's boat slips while non-Challengers line the river runway.

Below:
Kevin Brown - producer, director and co-star of the film Splash-in.

Photos courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin





Above: The Vintage Wings Cornell and Tiger Moth kick off their Yellow Wings Eastern Tour. Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



Just one of the many rainbow rows of Challengers. Photo courtesy Jim Bell

At right: Rob de Nijs prepares for a sightseeing flight to Ottawa in one of his family's Light Sports. To give some scale to this picture Rob is 6-foot-7 and doesn't have any problem fitting in the new-style cockpit! Photo courtesy Erin de Nijs



Below: This three-week-old Challenger Light Sport XL-65 with its distinctive new Canadian tail won the Best Showplane award for the de Nijs family. Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



Above: Second-time attendee David Fullgraf (left) brought his kid brother Rich this year. David is 90 and Rich is 85! David is assembling a Challenger Light Sport in Missouri. He flew B-24s in WW II and B-36s in the Korean War era. Photo courtesy Christine Fullgraf

At left: Doug Remoundos in his Challenger ultralight parallels the Vintage Wings Tiger Moth and Cornell. In his day job Doug flies Challenger jets! Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin

Below: Mike Potter brings the Vintage Wings Harvard in for a runway inspection pass. Photo courtesy Ben Folsy

At right: When the sun set on Friday there were fourteen Challengers tucked in for the night.

Photo courtesy Christine Fullgraf

Below: With 90 aircraft present parking was tight!

Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



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For those who may not realize this, Challenger engines are virtually impervious to even extreme cold while general aviation engines have lubrication shortfalls if their engines aren't preheated before starting. Clearly preheating outdoors a great distance from the nearest plug-in or propane is not practical.

Saturday Sessions

The indoor sessions were well attended which is amazing considering the aerial goings on outside the window! A two-hour lunch break allows everyone to participate in the action on the river.

First on the agenda was a Challenger news update by National Ultralight. The 2011 happenings were reviewed and the 2012 schedule was given for Westbello in Alberta, Eastbello in Nova Scotia and the Open House at Challenger headquarters in Ontario.

The news update continued with

the new Challenger Light Sport series which has proven popular, not surprising since it was designed expressly for our Canadian missions.

New for 2012 is the XS-65, a clip wing derivative of the XL-65 designed for people who want the absolute max cruise speed.

The Challenger line of aircraft now includes six models - three new Light Sport (XS-50, XS-65, XL-65) and three Classic Challengers (Legacy, Deluxe, Premium). Details of events and models are available at <http://www.challenger.ca>

Glenn Kennedy gave a pictorial account titled Challenger Superior Challenge of his 1,000-mile amphibious voyage from Edenvale, just north of Toronto, up and along the wild north shore of Lake Superior to his family cottage on Lake of the Woods near Kenora. This with only 120 hours total time - not bad for a first cross-country!

Glenn is a terrific example of focus and determination - he commuted between the Cayman Islands and Ontario to take his flying lessons! His reward is realizing his dream of having his Challenger at the dock at his family's cottage.





Above: Vince Landreville can go anywhere with his skis and oversize wheel combo seen here plus amphib floats for the warm months.

Below: Patrick Vinet, owner of Puddlejumper Floats, arrives from Mont-Tremblant with wife Elaine.
Photos courtesy Ben Foisy



At left: Peter Warburton's Challenger is easy to see against just about any background! Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



The river's icy crust is no match for this Cessna 185.

Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin

The dynamic duo of Dale Erhart and Darwin Dzuba from Courtenay, B.C. shared pictures and video of building and flying their two Challengers on the West Coast. Darwin's background is as a millwright so as you can imagine his pictures revealed a meticulously crafted Challenger with some clever detailing.

Dale narrated a slide show titled "From F-18 to A340 to Global Express - A Challenger Pilot's Perspective" which gave a fascinating inside look at his latest gig: four years spent living in the Med flying a private Bombardier Global Express all over the world for its VIP owner.

A member of the audience asked Dale why, with a logbook full of such high end

hardware, he would have any interest in flying a Challenger ultralight. Dale replied that as a professional pilot you are a puppet on a string whereas with your own Challenger you are the puppeteer.

In his Challenger he enjoys the freedom to go where he wants when he wants how he wants. As Dale spoke you could feel his enthusiasm.

Daniel Sasseville from Aéro Propulsion Technologies in St-Lazare, Que., the Eastern Canada Rotax Service Centre, shared his expert views on the care and feeding of Rotax engines. Rotax engines are by far the most popular not just in Challengers but in all of the advanced ultralight and light sport aircraft sector. Daniel's insights will help

attendees understand how proper maintenance and operation can help owners experience years of trouble-free enjoyment.

Rob Lake of Lake Aviation in Kingston, Ont., gave the audience a pictorial walk-through of his recent assembly of a new Challenger Light Sport XS-50. He elaborated on its flying qualities as compared to classic Challengers. Rob also discussed the assembly of a Challenger Light Sport XL-65 which he began after completing the XS-50.

Rob has assembled all the major Challenger models, new and old, 582 and 503, so he was a great source of technical information for the attendees.

Kathy Lubitz, president of the Ultralight Pilots Association of Canada (UPAC), informed the group of the very latest regulatory directions in Canada and the United States. Frank Hofmann, in his dual role of Eastern Vice-Chair of the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) and Canadian Representative at the International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations (IAOPA), gave his thoughts on the latest trends personal aviation worldwide.

Banquet and Awards

Claude Roy opened the festivities with a round of introductions of notables present and of people who had travelled from afar. After turning over the mic the indefatigable Claude and his lovely wife Joan Armstrong received a standing ovation for the tremendous work they have done for years to make the Challenger Winter Rendezvous the success that it is.

Then we asked those who flew-in to the fly-in to come forward for recognition. A veritable herd of pilots rose and migrated to the front of the hall! Each flyer took the

microphone to state where they were from and share a vignette of their adventure.

On Friday there was some unforecast weather to the west so the Challengers flying in from that direction landed on lakes to wait it out. Kevin Brown said that he picked a spot because he saw smoke coming from the chimney of a cabin. He enjoyed the hospitality of a warm drink in front of the fire.

Brent Thompson picked a lake with ice fishermen on it. When he landed and taxied up all the fishermen were furiously pulling up lines and hiding fish. They thought Brent was an aerial game warden!

While the stories were being told the Awards Committee was calculating distances to determine the winner of the Farthest Flown Award. It was a tie - the father and son team of Ed and Rob de Nijs flew their two Challenger Light Sports to Montebello from their farm near Windsor in southwestern Ontario.

There was some discussion between Ed and Rob as to who had actually flown the farthest. Rob gracefully acknowledged that his father had taxied forty feet further west in the field before taking off and heading east! This 1,500 km winter trip is especially notable because Ed and Rob only recently acquired their Ultralight Pilot Permits after training in their own aircraft! Instructor Bill Bryan must have prepared them well!

For the Best Showplane Award attendees are given a ballot form to vote for their favourite among the three dozen Challengers posed outside. The votes were tabulated by the internationally renowned accounting firm of Shagwinus Quirk McGillicuddy & Snodgrass.

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With its red nose this Challenger is easy to spot on short final. Photo courtesy Ben Foisy



Above: Artists know that red, yellow and blue are the primary triadic colours. This photo of a Kitfox carving the sky is indeed a work of art! Photo courtesy Pierre Langlois



At left: Water, water everywhere, but nary a drop to land in. At least not an unfrozen drop. Photo courtesy Ben Foisy

Below: There's not much point in having a cabin heater if you don't have a cabin! Photo courtesy Jim Bell

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The presenter was the charming and pretty Allison Brown, daughter of the pretty charming Bruce Brown. She opened the envelope and, as the audience held their collective breath, Claude and I gasped as we saw the tabulation of votes. The winner by a very large margin was Challenger C-IPRC — the new Challenger Light Sport XL-65 built by none other than Team de Nijs!

Father Ed and sons Rob and Chris came forward to receive the Oscar. The family assembled both their Challenger Light Sports on their farm with Chris commuting frequently from Kentucky to do his share. Another round of well-earned applause!

Next was the presentation of the Dave Allan Memorial Award given for a substantial technical contribution to the Challenger community. Dave was an extremely talented and knowledgeable Challenger builder and inspector who passed away from cancer in 2006. He gave freely of his time to owners across Canada who called for advice and he welcomed visitors to his workshop. The inscription on the award reads "A candle burns forever when it is used to light another."

The 2012 Allan award was won by the deserving and surprised Rob Lake of Lake Aviation in Kingston. Rob left his day job several years ago so he could spend his full time in the Challenger community.

He has assembled Challengers for himself and for others plus he has traveled to help owners at their homes. Rob has spent a huge amount of his personal time expanding his website with useful and informative information on assembly and other things technical. He literally wrote the book on installing the 582 power pack. As well Rob is more than generous in helping people all over Canada by phone and by email. Rob is indeed a most worthy recipient.

The final award of the evening honours the late Maurice Vinet who passed away from cancer in 2000. Maurice's company Puddlejumper Floats opened up new realms of pleasure for Challenger owners worldwide and is now run by his son Patrick Vinet. The recipients of the Maurice Vinet Memorial Award exemplify Maurice's passion for flight.

Now gentle reader you will

see why Claude and I gasped when the Best Showplane Award envelope was opened. The award for Best Showplane is based on the irrefutable tally of votes at the Rendezvous. The award for Farthest Flown is based on the irrefutable calculation of distance to the Rendezvous. The Vinet and Allan awards are based on a nomination and selection process that takes place weeks or months before the Rendezvous. All this is to say that there is no way to rig the outcome.

We had gasped because we knew the winner of the Vinet Award was none other than the de Nijs family! They took the Triple Crown!

Two of the three generations present came forward to receive the honour: Ed and Betty, Rob and Erin, Chris and Kara. Betty said she knew the family would be getting a Challenger when she saw the look on Ed's face after landing from his demo flight! Little did she know then that Challengers multiply in the dark so now they have not one but two Light Sports — a clip wing 503 and a long wing 582, both present at the Rendezvous. Better keep the lights in the barn on or there'll soon be a third Challenger!

We have seen no better example of passion for flight than the de Nijs family. When the boys were teenagers it was radio control models. Now it's full size. They assembled their Challengers in the workshop during the winter lull on the farm. All three generations participated — from unloading the boxes from the truck through assembling and launching the planes.

It was literally every man, woman and child. There is a picture on their Facebook page of an assembled but not yet covered wing — with a toddler asleep in between two ribs!

Following the awards ceremony we were treated to the world premiere of *Splash-in*, a new film by producer/director extraordinaire, but hitherto unknown, Kevin Brown.



Set to the music of Those Magnificent Men and Their Flying Machines and Take My Breath Away the 45-minute video had the audience alternating between laughter and "wow isn't that awesome."

Splash-in documents the adventures and misadventures of Kevin, Claude Roy and Patrick Vinet last summer as they flew their Challengers to the world's largest seaplane fly-in at Moosehead Lake in Greenville, Maine.

There the trio won three awards and made the local news! It is only fitting that the film about the world's largest seaplane fly-in should premiere at the world's largest skiplane fly-in!

We Built it and They Came

The Challenger Winter Rendezvous has proven itself once again to be the perfect antidote for cabin fever. What could be less claustrophobic than the world's largest log cabin! Next year the 23rd consecutive running of this premier aviation event of the Canadian winter will be at Chateau Montebello the first weekend in February. We

will celebrate the 30th birthday of the Challenger line of aircraft!

What is it about this event that creates such exuberance in the participants? What makes them so alive, so full of life? Why do they travel great distances in the middle of winter? Clearly the unique venue, the crisp clean air, the purity of untainted snow all motivate. Obviously the planes motivate as well.

Much of the motivation though comes from the camaraderie of the Challenger community - the shared passion for aviation and the energy imparted by being with like-minded people.

Vince Vairo drove to Montebello from his home near Tucson, Arizona where he is assembling a Challenger. Vince left the USAF as a full colonel having flown F-100 and F-4 tours in Viet Nam. He went on to a second career with a major airline and was flying the DC-10 when he retired a few years ago. Here is Vince's take on the Challenger Winter Rendezvous: "Incredible show, unmatched Canadian hospitality, a never to forget lifetime experience. Had a 'why didn't I

do that sooner?' experience."

"Why didn't I do that sooner?" Why indeed! Looking beyond a single event it is amazing how many people tell me they have always wanted to fly but haven't. Life's endless diversions have kept them from realizing their dreams. Now as they age many of the Baby Boomers who dominate recreational aviation are sensing that they are in a window of opportunity. They have worked long enough to earn the time and money to fly and they are still healthy enough to do so.

Recreational aviation is not about justifying utility or analyzing spreadsheets of figures. The cost of recreational aviation is easy to measure but the return benefit to the soul is impossible to quantify. Sometimes you have to make decisions from the heart rather than the brain! The window of opportunity is not unlimited so a sense of urgency is in order!

Go to <http://www.challenger.ca> for pictures and video from Montebello as well as information on the Challenger line of aircraft and events across Canada.