



Up, up and away!

Photo courtesy Benoit Foisy



Bet you haven't seen one of these on skis before. Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin



A group photograph and spectators at the Challenger Winter Rendezvous.

Photo courtesy Jean-Pierre Bonin

23rd Annual Challenger Winter Rendezvous

Celebrating three decades of an airplane and the people it attracts

By Bryan Quickmire

The first Challenger, a single seater, flew in 1983, the first two-seater in 1984. From the very beginning Challenger enthusiasts have been flocking together!

The most famous flocking is the annual Challenger Winter Rendezvous on the Ottawa River midway between Ottawa and Montreal. Chateau Montebello, operated by Fairmont Hotels, is the world's largest and most splendid log structure.

This has become the largest winter aviation event in Canada and, arguably, in the world. What else but the magnetic attraction of the Challenger community could pull together two or three hundred people and as many as 90 planes in the middle of the Canadian winter!

Challenger owners, wannabes and fans came from near and far - from the West Coast to the East Coast of Canada and from as far south as the Gulf Coast of the United States.

There were pilots with military or airline backgrounds as well as pilots who have flown solely for pleasure. They ranged from those who have commanded just about any aircraft you can think of, from Jennies to jets, to those who have piloted nothing but their own Challenger. There were aviation enthusiasts who have piloted nothing at all, at least not yet!

Owners ranged from those who have been flying Challengers since 1984 to those who have only recently started assembling their kits and are eagerly looking forward to their first flights. All owners as well as those considering becoming owners had a wealth of resources from the Challenger community to answer questions and offer advice.

National Ultralight, the Canadian distributor for Challenger, and many dealers, builders, inspectors and instructors were present. All the major Challenger suppliers were represented: Quad City (airframes), Bombardier Rotax (engines), Puddlejumper Floats (amphibs) and Turbulence Aviation (skis and accessories).

The major aviation groups who promote safety and represent our interests to the various levels of government sent delegations: the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association (COPA) and the Ultralight Pilots Association of Canada (UPAC).

Among the attendees at Montebello were several who have served their countries in particularly notable ways:

Challenger instructor Maurice Baril - better known as General Baril - served two terms as Chief of the Defense Staff in charge

of Canada's air force, army and navy. In 2011, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada "for his contributions to the nation, notably for his leadership as head of the Canadian Forces, and for his ongoing contributions to peacekeeping around the world".

Challenger owner Dave Cunningham came from Alabama and Challenger aficionado Ray Hinely came from Florida. They are retired F-4 pilots from the USAF where they were known as Col. Dave "Sly Pig" Cunningham and Col. Ray "Razor" Hinely. Both gentlemen are recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross which is awarded for heroism or extraordinary achievement in aerial combat.

This diversity is part of the appeal of the Challenger community - the common thread tying all these people together is their shared passion. The experienced members are generous with their wisdom and mentor the fledglings. Together they enjoy the versatility of this amazing aircraft, free from burdensome regulations and stifling air traffic control.

Stars on ice

Two days before the Rendezvous the advance party measured a foot of ice on the river topped with six inches of slushy wet snow, a byproduct of not one but two mid-winter thaws. Forty-eight hours later a local deep freeze had melded this into 18 inches of solid ice, skating rink smooth.

How smooth was it? Several people were spotted wearing crampons! Planes on straight skis, which have blades on the bottoms, glided along effortlessly going downwind and more than one was forced to turn off their engine to come to a stop.

Manoeuvring in the parking area sometimes required helpers at the wingtips to steer! There was literally not a flake of snow on the ice so several airplanes on wheels were able to land.

In addition to the Challengers on the ice a collection of non-Challengers accepted our invitation to join the festivities. 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. For more of their art click the links on www.challenger.ca

In the five-star digs

Montebello is great opportunity to learn, to share and to enjoy being with like-minded folks. For those so inclined there is also the luxurious spa, the indoor Olympic-size pool with hot tub, cross-country skiing and even dog sledding!

During the day on Saturday there were

five seminars and all played to full houses. People had ample opportunity between the sessions to interact with each other indoors at the exhibit area and in the grand lobby and outdoors on the river with the planes.

The day started with a news update and review of the past year. Challenger sales in 2012 were quite strong in Canada and abroad although the United States is still on the low side of its potential. During the year Challengers were shipped to every continent except Antarctica! The new Light Sport XL-65 originally designed expressly for Canada is now dominating sales worldwide!

We had some fun with a picture show which turned the clock back to the 1970s when the first ultralights were created by attaching chainsaw motors to hang gliders and suspending lawn chairs below their triangular wing. Voila, a new aviation segment was born!

From those pre-Challenger flivvers we traced the origins and evolution of the Challenger from 1983 to the present and discussed the most significant design changes along the way. We will be repeating this presentation at our events across Canada.

The afternoon sessions were in two parallel tracks. Sophie Langevin from the Magnes Group gave a primer on aircraft insurance - the coverages and the costs. New-

comers were surprised to learn that most Challenger owners pay less to insure their planes than they do their cars!

Rob Archibald from Nav Canada explained ADS-B and MLAT, technologies to replace ground based radar for air traffic control, and how they will influence recreational aviation in the future. Rob is well positioned to do this since he manages the technology implementation at Nav Canada plus he is assembling a new Challenger Light Sport! The audience was relieved to learn they won't have to install any new electronics in their Challengers for the foreseeable future.

COPA director Frank Hofmann spoke of the beginnings of aviation and how we have benefited from the experience of others. UPAC president Kathy Lubitz gave a slide presentation of UPAC through time and discussed its role as a credible voice to Transport Canada.

Kathy also reviewed the safety record of ultralights and the causes of accidents. Statistics from a 10-year period show that ultralights are actually safer than Cessnas and such which is contrary to the views of those whose perceptions are rooted in the past on the motorized hang gliders flown by untrained daredevils.

Ed de Nijs with sons Rob and Chris and



Best showplane award winner.



vous



Above:
Summer
boat slips
are excellent
winter
tie-downs.

Photo courtesy
Jim Bell

At left:
Poster courtesy
Dave O'Malley
and Jean-Pierre
Bonin



A Challenger literally slides by Chateau Montebello.

Photo courtesy Benoit Foisy

tory in Illinois, accepted the award on behalf of the team.

The final award of the evening honours the late Maurice Vinet who passed away from cancer in 2000. Maurice founded Puddle-jumper Floats which is now run by his son Patrick. Recipients of the Maurice Vinet Memorial Award exemplify Maurice's passion for flight.

The 2013 Vinet Award went to Bill Bryan who acquired his Challenger via the Kit-By-Section program over a two year period. Bill became hooked on flying so he exited from his auto repair business to spend all his time on Challenger activities. He has since become one of the most sought after instructors, builders and inspectors in Ontario yet he still finds time to fly his Challenger for the simple pleasure it brings.

The piece de resistance of the banquet was the premiere of "Deep South", the second music video by Kevin Brown, who at last Montebello aired his first work titled Splash-in.

Deep South traces the adventures of three amigos who fly three Challengers 3,000 miles and end up back where they started. They did not find a holy grail however they did find enlightenment in the knowledge that what matters most is the journey not the destination. The maxim really is true!

For those who missed the video, there was a seven page feature in the January 2013 issue of *COPA Flight* detailing their jaunt from Central Canada down the west side of the Appalachians and Alleghenies to the Gulf of Mexico then across Florida to the Atlantic and back up the eastern seaboard.

Thirty years of evolution

Those first Challengers 30 years ago looked and flew like real airplanes, which was a quantum leap from the hang gliders with lawn chairs and chain saw motors. Today, over 4,000 airplanes and several hundred design changes later, the Challenger line of aircraft is dramatically more capable and still maintains its position in front of the pack.

From an airplane meant for sunny summer days at smooth grass strips, the Challenger has evolved to become uniquely versatile. Today owners can easily switch between wheels, tundra wheels, skis, wheel/skis and amphibious floats.

Today's models have heated cabins and engines needing no preheating which makes them true four season aircraft. Cruise speeds

grading to the new XL-65 model from an older Classic Challenger. With three Light Sport assemblies under their belts they had lots of hints and tips for the audience!

In the banquet hall

After a superb meal the crowd gave a standing ovation to the indefatigable Claude Roy and his lovely wife Joan Armstrong for the tremendous effort they have put in over the years to make the Challenger Winter Rendezvous the success that it is.

We then asked those who flew in to the fly-in to come forward for recognition. Each flyer took the microphone to state where they were from and as they did the Awards Committee kept mental notes on the distances travelled.

For the Farthest Flown award there was a tie between John Baker and John Sutherland who flew in formation from Baldwin Airport near Toronto. They debated who had actually flown farthest – in the manner of the "Who's on First?" routine of Abbott and Costello – but agreed to hang the plaque on the patio they share between their hangars.

For the Best Showplane award attendees are given a ballot to vote for their favourite among the Challengers parked outside. The votes were tabulated by the charming Allison Brown and the winner by a large margin was Mike Prescott for C-IMMP also known as Sea Imp for its call sign and nose art.

The Dave Allan Memorial Award is 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.

The 2013 Allan Award was fittingly given to The Challenger Team at Quad City who created the jewel in the crown. Karen Oltman, general manager at the Challenger fac-

helper Joe Riedl gave a "show and tell" about their experiences assembling not one, not two, but three Challenger Light Sports! The de Nijs family took delivery of their first kit in January 2010 and completed assembly three months later.

They soon realized one plane wasn't enough for three wannabe pilots so last winter they assembled another in time to fly both planes to Montebello. This winter they are assembling a kit for a local owner who is up-



Photo courtesy Benoit Foisy