

Photo by Paul Bergen Abbott, Rotorcraft

Over 100 homebuilt helicopters will descend on the town of Mentone this month for the annual Popular Rotorcraft Association convention and fly-in. It will be the second consecutive year Mentone has been the site of the show. The international association purchased the Mentone airport a couple of years ago and has made the Kosciusko County town its permanent headquarters.

Whirlybirds return to 'Egg Basket'

Mentone to once again host annual fly-in of homebuilt helicopters

by Richard G. Biever

Though the association has been around for 35 years, only in 1995 did it find a permanent base of operations.

Capistrano has its swallows. Hinckley, Ohio, has its buzzards.

And now, Indiana's own Mentone has its whirlybirds. For the second year in a row, over 100 homemade helicopters — called rotorcraft — will descend for a week-long convention and fly-in at the far north-central Indiana town.

The town of 900 residents in Kosciusko County is perhaps best known for its giant concrete egg and slogan as the "Egg Basket" of the Midwest. Now, it's also the home roost for the Popular Rotorcraft Association — ever since the association bought the town's airport.

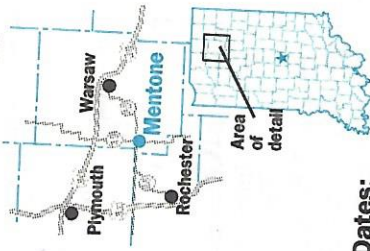
The international association's 35th annual convention is expected to draw more than 3,000 spectators and pilots from around the United States and more than eight other countries, including Australia, Sweden and New Zealand. The fly-in will be held July 22 through 27. Admission to the fly-in and convention is open to the general public.

Homebuilt rotorcraft is the fastest-growing segment of sport aviation today, the association says. Mostly built from kits, the aircraft are akin to ultra-light airplanes. Visitors to the show will likely see a wide range of styles and designs — everything from tiny open one-person contraptions that look like go-carts with rotor blades on a stick to sporty little craft you'd expect to see James Bond flying to larger enclosed helicopters. But they all can skitter across the skies and hover like hummingbirds.

Highlights of the show will include gyroplane and helicopter rides, factory flight demonstrations, competitions, flight instruction, rotorcraft flea market, forums and seminars, entertainment, an auction, special guest speakers and fireworks.

This year's convention is themed "Remembering Our Roots" and will look back and salute the pioneers of rotorcraft flying.

Rotorcraft show returns to Mentone



Dates:

July 22-27

Location:

PRA Mentone Airport. Mentone is in Kosciusko County on Indiana highways 25 and 19.

Admission: \$5 a day per person, 12 years and older

For more details:

Contact the Popular Rotorcraft Association, P.O. Box 68, Mentone, IN 46539, (219) 353-7227.

the association's office manager, said the association was looking for a permanent home in a rural setting when they found the Mentone airport for sale at a good price, she said.

The association resurfaced the main runway and repainted the stripes, and added a concession stand and a 128-site electric campground. Though it is privately owned by the association, the airport is open for public use and can be rented for other events. It also continues to offer two turf runways, hangars and aviation fuel. The airport is served electrically by Kosciusko REMC.

Past fly-ins and conventions had been held in Indiana and around the Midwest many times because of the central location. And, "There's a lot of gyro activity in this part of the country," Gillmore added.

Gillmore said interest in rotorcraft has increased in the area because of last year's show. A new chapter recently started in the Valparaiso area.

She said the association plans to add a rotorcraft museum to the airport next year. That museum, though, won't be the first aircraft museum for Mentone. The Bell Aircraft Museum also makes its home there. During last year's fly-in and scheduled again for this year, shuttle buses will run visitors from the fly-in to the Bell museum.

Folks in the area interested in seeing the convention and fly-in should make plans to attend this year's show. Gillmore said the fly-in will probably once again be moving from site to site around the country each year as local chapters of the association step forward to host the large event.

But with the association's home roost now permanently in Mentone, she noted, "It's always a possibility it will be here."

Richard G. Biever is associate editor of Electric Consumer.