

TANNKOSH

The European Oshkosh

by Thomas Borchert

Photos by Christina Scheunemann

Aerial photo of Tannkosh 2010 looking from the west.

The story is familiar to every pilot: Some years back, a handful of pilots met at a remote airfield to spend a weekend of aviation fun together. Fast forward to 2011 and you have the biggest fly-in on the European continent, with an amazing seven to eight percent of the country's GA fleet in attendance, pilots camping next to their parked aircraft, all the big aviation manufacturers and pilot shops exhibiting, a spectacular air show during the day and splendid hangar parties in the evening.

It sounds very much like Oshkosh, but it's not. I am talking about Europe's largest general aviation fly-in at the grass field of Tannheim (population 2,345) in southern Germany, about 60 miles due west of Munich. Years ago, pilots gave the event a name that stuck for rather obvious reasons: Tannkosh!

That first Tannkosh fly-in was in 1993: Some 25 ultralights came; back in the day when ultralight flying was new and Tannheim was at the center of this exciting, new and cheaper way of flying. Ultralights in Europe span from what the United States calls microlights to aircraft very similar to LSAs with a lower weight limit. In 2010, almost 1,000 aircraft of all kinds flew in. The meeting has

long been open not just to ultralights, but also to all classes of aircraft. As mentioned, that number as a percentage of the overall German GA fleet is in the same ballpark as the 10,000 or so aircraft coming to EAA Air Venture in Oshkosh every year. One difference, however, is that Tannkosh visitors come from all over Europe. The long distance trophy last year went to a crew from Romania, with two groups from the UK as runner-ups.

Tannheim airfield (EDMT) is a tiny backcountry strip by U.S. standards, and very much an average small town airfield from a European pilot's perspective. The runway is 3,353 feet of well-kept grass, with aircraft parking during Tannkosh extending into the surrounding corn fields. The German Air Force has been a regular Tannkosh visitor with a C-160 Transall turboprop transport (MTOW 112,000 lbs) – the biggest aircraft landing at the show, but you will mostly see single engine pistons and ultralights.



Swiss Pilatus P2 military trainer, departing with smoke on.



Taxiing along the flightline for an afternoon departure.

Tannheim is unique in that it is one of the few airfields in Germany founded and run by a family, the Dolderers. Farmer Max Dolderer converted part of his land to an airfield during the mid-70s, a huge undertaking involving a lot of bureaucracy in Germany. He and his wife, Helga, became the patrons of Tannheim airfield until their children, Verena and Matthias, took over from them; both are active flight instructors. Matthias was part of the German National Ultralight team and went on to become a renowned aerobatic pilot and ultimately a Red Bull Air Race participant. Meanwhile, his sister Verena became the heart and soul of Tannkosh.

The event and its organization are in many ways similar to Air Venture, but on a much smaller scale. This is still an event “by pilots for pilots” and the commercial aspect is rather small, but growing. The atmosphere of a family gathering pervades the three days from Friday to Sunday, although many visitors arrive on Thursday. A dedicated crowd of volunteers make Tannkosh possible, from the controllers who very successfully bring order to pilots arriving at this uncontrolled field without actually giving instructions, to the parking people guiding aircraft to their spots on all-terrain vehicles.



Friday evening's hangar party.



Typical airplane camping.

Along the runway on one side, there's a line-up of the aircraft participating in the airshow or otherwise considered special, followed by exhibitor tents. On the other side, regular attendees pitch tents right next to their aircraft. More airplanes are parked on adjacent fields which are used for farming during the rest of the year. Port-a-potties and portable shower units are set up at regular intervals.

The show plane flight line is distinctly European. While a fair share of U.S. classics such as a Stearman, Red Bull's Corsair, a group of Cubs and more, can be found, there are also formations of Yaks and Zlins, a German Me109 fighter from World War II, a Swiss Pilatus P2 trainer, a Morane-Saulnier MS 317 and one of the very few still flying Polikarpov PO-2 – the Soviet equivalent to the Boeing Stearman and the world's second most-produced aircraft after the Cessna 172.

The airfield is closed for arrivals and departures at regular intervals throughout the day for 20 minutes of airshow performances. During that time, Matthias Dolderer demonstrates the Edge 540 he uses in the Red Bull Air Race, and various formation teams show their art, even a Lufthansa Airbus 380 did a low pass last year.

Not at all Oshkosh-like are the hangar parties every evening. They are typical Southern-German beerfests in the best sense. A hangar is converted to a beer tent with aircraft still hanging in storage under the roof; a band is playing, people are dancing, and sauerkraut and bratwurst are offered. This goes on until four in the morning when the last party guests stumble back to their tents.

The record year for Tannkosh attendance was in 2008 with 1,300 aircraft attending, but that was mainly due to unseasonably bad weather keeping many would-be visitors home in 2009 and 2010. Frequent rain made camping last year rather hardcore, but there are several hotels

and small B&Bs in the area. Many non-pilot visitors drive in by car and get their first exposure to general aviation in the best possible way. Since last year, the event is held on the last weekend of August, which in 2011 falls on August 26-28 (see www.tannkosh.com for details).

Just like Oshkosh, the Tannkosh fly-in is a unique celebration of aviation, with maybe 15,000 visitors over the long weekend. It is a perfect mix of camaraderie, airshows and a little aviation commerce which, despite its size, the Dolderers still manage to make into a family party; a mix that can only be found at Tannkosh.

From a COPA perspective, here's the embarrassing thing about Tannkosh: Last year (my first, by the way), there were all of **two** Cirrus aircraft present; a brand new SR22T

brought in by Jan-Peter Fischer of Cirrus Germany and the turbo-normalized G3 I had the privilege of flying there. I hope to see more of you this year; it's really hard to have more aviation fun pressed into a single weekend than at Tannkosh. If you have any questions about the event or going there in a Cirrus, feel free to contact me at thomas.borchert@fliegermagazin.de or on the COPA forums. [COPA](#)



The author arriving in an SR22 G3 Turbo.

About the Author: Thomas Borchert is editor-in-chief of Fliegermagazin, Germany's large general aviation monthly magazine. He started flying gliders in 1983 and moved on through motor gliders to single engine piston flying, both VFR and IFR. He is currently looking for partners to buy a used SR22TN in his hometown of Hamburg, Germany.