

# SPECIAL: Introducing the AIRCRAFT KIT INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

*By David Gustafson*



There have been a number of manufacturer's associations out there over time, including GAMA, LAMA, and SAMA. Now comes AKIA, the organization that focuses entirely on the homebuilt aircraft industry. It's no easy matter to bring together a group of successful and opinionated leaders from the companies that make homebuilding what it is today, but the challenge is somewhat ameliorated by the common interest and commercial "stake" that they all have in the issues relating to Experimental Amateur Built Aircraft safety. The record is not good. It could be improved.

It will.

A series of conference calls involving 14 different companies in the industry produced some surprising results in terms of what some leaders are doing in addressing safety. Transition training, systems checks and other preparations for the first flight, Phase One flight testing and pilot proficiency are viewed by the group as matters of mutual interest. Safety concerns and ways of addressing those concerns are not and should not be considered proprietary. The group is

in agreement on that matter and expects to develop one or a series of papers that will be shared with homebuilders through this site and others. They are also concerned about "orphan" aircraft that are purchased as a second hand aircraft and have no factory support (e.g., people who buy VariEzes).

One of the current, major obstacles to providing transition training for pilots is regulatory obstacles to using homebuilts commercially for training. AKIA would like to address this problem with the FAA.

The group is eager to participate in future meetings with EAA, FAA and the NTSB whenever issues about EAB safety arise. "It is essential that we improve communications within the regulatory environment," said Dick VanGrunsven, founding president of the group. "AKIA has a vested interest in the industry and is enthusiastic about sharing knowledge and taking actions that can enhance safety."

Members of AKIA are also eager to meet with EAA to discuss homebuilding and its place in the organization as EAA moves forward. Homebuilding was the core value that launched EAA and the leaders in the kit aircraft industry have a strong desire to

assure that homebuilding will always be an active and recognized part of EAA's agenda. "Our industry is dynamic and vibrant. Homebuilders remain one of the most innovative and stimulating sources for aviation development," said VanGrunsven. "It's up to the leaders in this industry to assure that EAA and all other aviation organizations are provided with topical information as it evolves so that the membership base of EAA is kept informed of what's new and what's different. We think it would be a great idea to have one or more industry representatives on the EAA Board of Directors to assure that homebuilding and EAB developments are properly communicated and represented among that group. And that brings up an essential point: AKIA was formed to work with EAA. We hope our knowledge and experience will be of value to them in determining policy and direction. We're encouraged that EAA was quick to acknowledge AKIA and expressed a desire to work with us. We will always be a small organization, but we will look to EAA for guidance and assistance, which we would like to offer in

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return. This venture should create understandings that are a win/win activity for all of us.”

VanGrunsven indicated that AKIA also desires to work with EAA to make more people aware of the excitement and education associated with building an aircraft. To that end, they plan to propose a number of activities to EAA that would stimulate interest in the homebuilt industry. “Paul Poberezny designed and built a number of different airplanes,” said VanGrunsven. “The shop at EAA was always busy with some kind of homebuilt project and that, in turn, had a significant impact on the growth of EAA and the number of homebuilts that are now on the FAA registry. We’d like to see more homebuilt aircraft activities associated with EAA HQ staff.”

AKIA membership is open to any company engaged in manufacturing aircraft kits or products that are associated with the homebuilt industry. The charter members of the Association include Vans Aircraft, Sonex Aircraft, Zenith Aircraft, Kitfox Aircraft, Glasair Aircraft, Lockwood Aviation, Lancair Aircraft, Arion Aircraft, WagAero, Aircraft Spruce & Specialty, Wicks Aircraft, Dynon Avionics and Communication Resources. AKIA hopes that dozens of other companies related to the homebuilt industry will soon become members. Their objec-

tives can best be achieved when all industry resources are utilized and are working in harmony. Dick VanGrunsven is President, John Monnett is Vice President and David Gustafson is the Secretary/Treasurer.