Local

Watsonville Fly-In turns 21

WATSONVILLE — After 21 years, what can the West Coast Antique Fly-In possibly do for an encore? Judging by the throngs that packed the area around Watsonville Airport on Saturday, air show fans are satisfied with the main event, as it is and as it has been for years.

Low clouds that persisted past noon finally cleared just as a wing-walking Alan Silver dropped out of the cloud cover into the wild blue yonder. Silver's colorful parachute had an American flag affixed to it, and as he floated to earth, the national anthem boomed out over loudspeakers.

The Fly-In, a timeless piece of Americana, had begun. A crowd estimated at 50,000 was expected to attend the show, the second largest such event (one held in Oshkosh, Wis. is said to be bigger) in the country. More than 800 aircraft were expected to descend into Watsonville for the event.

The Fly-In continues today, opening with the traditional lumberjack breakfast at the Grange in Corralitos, from 6-10 a.m. The contest, air show and fly-bys will be from noon and 4 p.m.

The airport is off Highway 1 at the Airport Boulevard exit. Streets leading to the airport have been made temporarily one-way by Watsonville police. Parking space is available at Tandem Computers' and at Seagate Technologies' parking lots for $2; with shuttle service available to the airport.

Saturday, necks craned, french-fried artichokes dropped to the ground, as spectators, some dressed in military fatigues and flight suits, marveled again at the well-tended machines cruising above.

One of the more popular spots to watch, out of the crush on the airport tarmac and away from the booths selling inflatable planes and World War II practice bombs ($25), seemed to be on top of recreational vehicles. The more enterprising of RV squatters were outfitted with barbecues, television sets and reclining loungers.

If these fans were not up, up and away, at least they were up on the roof, with all the comforts of home.

Up in the air, meanwhile, aerobatics had begun — led off by Jim Nissen in his 1917 JN4 ''Jenny'' which roared across the sky powered by a 90-HP engine. Nissen, of Livermore, brought the old World War I trainer in perfectly for a landing, despite the plane's lack of brakes or steering. Various Cessnas, Ryans, Stearmans, biplanes and sailplanes recaptured the glory that once was.

Spectators waited patiently for the 1940s-era Stearman biplane piloted by Eddie Andreini, whose stunts — loops, hammerheads and stalls — are among the most popular year after year.

Admission is $5 adults, $2 children. Trophies will be awarded in several categories, ranging from Best Replica to Furthest Flown to Fly-In.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

All eyes turned skyward for Saturday's air show

German World War II Fiesler Storch flies above Watsonville