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Sponsors call Fly-In a 'success'

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Final figures aren't in yet, but organizers are calling this year's Antique Airplane Fly-In a success.

Other than a minor accident after the show closed — the nose gear of one of the display planes crumbled as it taxied down the runway, aborting take off — things went smoothly, said Gene Cox, the president of the Northern California Antique Airplane Association, which puts on the show.

John Strehl, 51, of Marin City, the pilot of the T28, a military trainer airplane, was unharmed in the accident, which occurred Sunday at about 5:25 p.m. The nose gear apparently bent, then broke, causing the plane to tip forward and breaking the propeller.

Attendance was "average to above average" compared to other years, at about 12,000 "walk-ins" and 2,500 spectators flying in for the show, Cox said. Last year, it rained over the weekend, and only 6,000 people attended.

"It went well," Cox said, "I'm sure we made up on our losses from last year."

Cox said attendance has been higher in the past. Because of the loss the group incurred last year, its budget for the show, about \$65,000, was cut back. Cox said it was possible that attendance might have been higher if there had been more money available for promotion.

He wasn't complaining though: "Everything went just like clockwork. We've got our spirits back."

Cox said a requirement that the show carry a \$10 million insurance policy wasn't as big a deal as some thought. The antiquers group had asked the city to consider dropping the requirement to \$5 million, hoping to save some money. Cox said the majority of airshows have insurance of \$5 million or less. But when the city refused to lower its requirement, the group simply purchased the additional coverage, Cox said.

Last year was also the first year the antiquers group put on the show without the help of the local Chamber of Commerce, which had complained that its volunteers did most of the work but the antiquers got most of the proceeds. Cox said the antiquers group had been a bit nervous about how things would go this year.

Cox said the show will return to Watsonville next year.

"The weather kind of solidified that," he said.