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## Doing the Wright thing

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SEVEN Malaysians, who are members of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Malaysia Chapter 1090, took off last Saturday for the AirVenture 2003 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in the United States, to join thousands of aviation enthusiasts the world over.

The group is led by EAA Malaysia president Captain K. Sivaraman, who is also a Malaysia Airlines pilot. The annual convention runs from July 29 to Aug 4.

Sivaraman said this year's convention is special as it is a prelude to the centenary celebrations of the first powered flight by the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, over the deserted sand dunes of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina on Dec 17, 1903.

"To symbolically re-enact the Wright brothers' flight, we have taken with us a scale model of their biplane Wright Flyer which was built by EAA member Ken Hyde over three years. Our participation at Oshkosh carries on the tradition of promoting aviation among Malaysians and raising awareness of the significance of the Wrights' achievements," he said.

The original Wright Flyer looked frail, and was held together by bamboo, wood, cloth fabric, piano wire, slender wooden propellers, and an anaemic one-horsepower petrol engine.

Mounted on wooden rails, much like a train, the Wright Flyer had its pilot lying centrally prone in between its wings. Its wing tip had to be steadied to keep the aircraft level during the run-up. On the day history was made, the aircraft flew about 35 metres for 12 seconds.

"There will also be the annual gala gathering of Young Eagles (or aviators aged below 18 years) at the Airventure Museum to raise funds for inspiring and educating future generations of young pilots through youth educational programmes," said Sivaraman.

Other highlights include an auction of items and raffle prizes, an opportunity to have one's model airplane painted by renowned aviation artist James Dietz, or spend time with some of racing's top drivers courtesy of Roush Racing.

Sivaraman said that about 2,800 show aircraft will be featured in the convention. These include homebuilts, antiques, classics, warbirds, ultralights and rotorcraft.

You might see anything from the Spirit of St Louis to a Stealth fighter, along with state-of-the-art examples of today's top military hardware.

"At Oshkosh, you may inspect firsthand the craftsmanship and designs of EAA members. If you're interested in a particular airplane, chances are you'll find it in Oshkosh, not to mention many of the newsmakers and personalities who make the world of aviation so exciting," said Sivaraman.

Then there's KidVenture, which has attracted thousands of participants, young and old alike, with its hands-on, educational and fun aviation-based demonstrations and presentations. There, children get to build their own gliders and rockets, fly simulators, see aviation legends tell their stories, ride in a tethered hot-air balloon, and much more.

As a run-up to Oshkosh, EAA Malaysia helped organise the Young Eagles Air Rally for 150 children at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang on July 19.

Sivaraman said that in keeping with the pioneering spirit of aviation, EAA Malaysia will organise three more events.

The first will be a Four Corners Air Race in December involving light

aircraft racing around a 2,003km closed circuit to cover the four corners of the country.

"This race will test the crew and aircraft on endurance and skills over a 12-hour period. Military aircraft will also be involved. Other than local teams, we expect participants from Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Australia," said Sivaraman, adding that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be invited to act as chief marshal to flag off the race.

There will also be a two-day Centennial Year of Flight carnival that will feature interactive displays and other aviation activities, also in December. A microlight air rally is on the cards for May till June next year.

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