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The Big Blue World: Evekotor Sportstar SL

The Evekotor SportStar SL is friendly to fly, sturdy, beautiful and roomy—and what a view!

By James Lawrence



Photo By: Mitch Bowers

Below, the greening, lake-dotted checkerboard of central Florida stretches in every direction. It's a beautiful day to be flying a beautiful bird. Color me happy!



But it's the view overhead that has my attention right now. Cruising out from our afternoon takeoff from Sebring Airport, it feels like someone tossed us up into a big blue fishbowl. I ease the center-mounted stick left, and the Evekotor SportStar responds like it read my mind. This is "dreamflight."

Throttling up the Rotax 912 ULS and easing back on the stick, the SportStar climbs creamy smooth, with pitch pressures light as whipped butter. The super-sensitive electric trim button on top of the stick makes adjusting pitch quick and easy.

Rolls left and right, slow flight, approach and departure stalls—oh yeah. The SportStar couldn't be more solid—or more responsive.

Stick and pedal feedback? Ditto. Controls are light yet not oversensitive. What more can you ask of a recreational airplane?

Every sky bird has its own personality, and Evektor's SportStar SL is no wallflower. I'll remember it most for the comfortable, light but balanced control feel, near-top-of-class performance (110-knot cruise, 45-knot clean stall) and clean, friendly curves.

But that open-sky fishbowl feel, courtesy of the clear, bulbous canopy, comes back to me now. You don't get that sensation in even the most generously windowed high-wing aircraft. Not to knock high-wingers, but airplanes like this one deliver the same visceral context as skinny-dipping at a country pond: Yep, a little exposed, a little daring, but way cool. You become a part of the sky.



Much of that derives from your high perch on the wing. First, the cowl slopes away in front to a panoramic forward view. The clear canopy line drops to where your arms rest. And the canopy also bulges out and away before rounding overhead, bestowing 46.5 inches in width—nearly four feet of wiggle room. It's a real room with a view, and what a view.

The SportStar SL's forward-hinged bubble canopy offers pilots buckled into the low-wing LSA excellent visibility.

Headroom is generous for pilots up to about six-foot-two. And since useful load (basic configuration) is 591 pounds, and fuel capacity is 31 gallons, you've got more than 400 pounds of cargo available. Stowable baggage limit is 55 pounds, leaving 345 pounds for people and full fuel. That'll work.

Feelin' Groovy

Flight reviewers describe the SportStar as a "five-minute" airplane. The notion: There are flivvers in which you feel at home right away, while others take half an hour or several flights to dial in. Place the Evektor SportStar SL firmly in the first category.

Of course, as in life, there are tradeoffs. Due to the low wing and its dihedral, vision is blocked looking straight down or low out to the sides, a sight-line restriction you don't experience in high-wing birds. But that's what turns are made for, right? When you bank a low-winger, the world below opens up. That's actually helpful for runway views in the pattern, a plus for training.

The debate has raged since the early days of flight, but there's no clear winner in the eternal debate between high-wing versus low-wing aficionados. My demo flight host, Barry Pruitt, who works with Evektor Aircraft Inc., the U.S. HQ for North and South America, puts it this way: "It's a personal preference. For example, low wings generally do better in moderate crosswinds, while high-wing trainers tend to cover up a myriad of errors in technique."



One challenge endemic to all bubble-canopy low-wingers is the blazing sun. You can fry your noodle in a clear-canopy airplane, so keep those hats and sunglasses close by. The silver SportStar SL I flew had an effective optional sliding curtain to filter out the objectionable intensities of midday.

By The Numbers

The SportStar SL is the current iteration of the very first LSA to pass ASTM certification (back in 2005). It has enjoyed steady U.S. sales since then, consistently ranking in the top five as it moves close to 100 total U.S. registrations. And it's a fitting endorsement to Evektor's training-role marketing strategy that 43 of those aircraft, nearly half, went to flight schools.

Walking around the airplane, you're impressed with the quality of the metalwork and finish. The sturdy spring tricycle gear lends validity to the training role. Build-wise, the aluminum airframe and skin feature riveted—and bonded—construction for long fatigue life.



And that big forward-hinged bubble canopy is more than just eye candy: Designed to handle a ground rollover, it meets all the crew protection requirements of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) Joint Aviation Requirements-Very Light Aircraft (JVA-VLA) regulations. There's even an open/closed idiot light on the panel for people like me who forget to latch canopies.

The 46.5-inch-wide cabin offers generous headroom for tall pilots and can be outfitted with optional TruTrak EFIS displays, a Garmin GPSMAP, a ballistic-parachute rescue system and a sliding curtain to shade the clear bubble canopy.

Standard seat belts are four-point. A ballistic-parachute rescue system is offered as an option, which I personally consider a must-have. Armrests, adjustable rudder pedals, eyeball air vents, a center-console-mounted fuel selector and other quality interior features make the SportStar one of the nicest finished LSA out there. What student, or fun flyer, wouldn't want cabin time in this beauty?

My only knock: I'd prefer a little more cushion in the "sitz" part. Lots of pilots add their own pads for long flights anyway, so consider this a minor quibble.

Speaking of long flights, SportStar has good range: 700 nm. Service ceiling is 15,500 feet, which gets you over the higher mountains without hunting for low passes. And you'll get there with a solid 4.6 gph fuel burn at 75% cruise. Barry Pruitt has more to say on that subject.

"I read 5.2 gallons per hour on the readout with amazing regularity," he says, "but the actual rate is lower. I've calculated burn from more than 2,200 coast-to-coast hours over the last three years: It's 4.6 gallons per hour. I could easily recalibrate the display, but I like that additional cushion of 0.6 gallons per hour."

Almost forgot to mention the rudder: You don't need much to center up the ball in climb or power back descent. And landings are a breeze. Settle in over the fence at 55 to 60 knots, round out at about five to 10 feet, and the SL floats along in ground effect, then settles right on.

Keep 'Em Flying

There's nothing like having a beautiful new airplane replete with new tech bells and whistles to take you where you want to go. But life can serve up unexpected bumps. Repairs from mishaps are a fact of life, which is why the customer-support infrastructure is the second leg upon which the LSA industry will continue to march forward—or stumble.

Mindful of the need to quickly respond to his many flight school customers, Pruitt addressed a recent evolution in his company's support profile: standardization of stock parts.

"From now on, all SportStars and replacement parts will be white—with customizable graphic markings by Air Graphics LLC. That allows us to get parts out quickly for schools so they don't have much downtime in their revenue stream."



Because parts are made in the overseas factory, Pruitt was concerned that custom-color orders were delaying some repairs for weeks.

"Spares have been a problem for every manufacturer. Now, I can have them hanging on the wall ready to go, so my only question is, 'Overnight or UPS ground?'" Pruitt also went to American-made Matco wheels and brakes, replacing the European system.

In 2005, the SportStar SL became the first LSA to pass ASTM certification; since then, it has consistently ranked in the top five for U.S. LSA sales.

To The Max

In the works as you read this is an update to the SL—the SportStar Max. Famed aircraft speed-mod maker LoPresti Speed Merchants, notorious for its aerodynamic wizardry in conjuring extra knots per hour out of stock airframes, is working with Evektor-Aerotechnik of the Czech Republic on the mods. LoPresti designed a sleek cowl and wheel pants that add four knots to the SL's maximum cruise, raising it from 115 knots to 119 knots. Wing vortex generators are also in the works.

"The Max raises the design's maximum weight from 1,268 pounds to the full LSA spec of 1,320," says Pruitt. "We were worried that the vortex generators would slow the airplane down, but once the LoPresti cowl and wheel pants went on, we ended up just below the LSA legal top speed of 120 knots."

When final fitting and test-flying are done overseas, the Max will have a useful load of 640 pounds, among the highest in the industry. Economy cruise will also bump a bit, to around 114 knots.

Choice Of An Ace

You know you've got something good when veteran pilots pick your airplane out of the madding crowd. At Sebring, I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Paul Hissey, who flew a



P-38 in combat in World War II. Mr. Hissey bubbled over with enthusiasm, for good reason: He had just taken delivery—on his 87th birthday!—of a SportStar SL loaded to the gills with TruTrak EFIS displays, Garmin 496 with weather, Mode S transponder and more.

“I’ve got more avionics in there than I had in my Cessna 182!” he crowed.

Part of Mr. Hissey’s purchase deal was to fly from Florida to his hometown Hawthorne Airport near Los Angeles International—with Pruitt riding shotgun to show him the airplane’s finer points.

“Mr. Hissey seemed to have a great time,” Pruitt reported later. “We made several stops along the way to see friends and family.” May we all serve, and endure in our love of flight, as well as Paul Hissey. Happy birthday, sir! By the way, most of the trip out west was flown below 2,000 feet AGL. And the fuel burn? Yep—right at 4.6 gph.