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FPNA: Float Planes and Amphibians

The Empire Expands: More Facilities, Services, & Products

FPNA, or Float Planes and Amphibians, was a new face at the first Sebring LSA show five years ago. Since then, the company has quietly grown, improved, and expanded; now it covers three facilities in Florida, manufactures several models of LSA, sells and maintains everything from new PPCs and trikes to used Cessna and Piper twins, and runs a Rotax Authorized Repair Center and a full Part 141 flight school, instructing in PPCs, weight-shift, and fixed-wing aircraft, and features tickets from Sport Pilot through ATP, with both land and sea ratings.

With facilities in Sebring, Clearwater, and Sebastian, Florida, the FPNA "empire" covers GA (General Aviation) from its most-basic needs through its most-advanced, from basic Experimental and LSA aircraft and *ab initio* training, through twin-engine aircraft kits and training, all the way through ATP (airline transport pilot) tickets, with instrument, commercial, CFI, multi-engine, A&P, and other ratings available. They're passionate about the "float planes" part of their name, as well. FPNA offers "seaplane" training and ratings, floatplanes, amphibians, and even their own line of floats.

Let's look first at the hardware.

FPNA is a manufacturer, dealer, and importer of both experimental and LSA aircraft. The LSA offerings include the FPNA-designed A-22 Valor and float-specific Cape Town, along with PPCs from Powrachute and Pegasus, and trikes from Airborne.

The Experimental offerings are even more diverse, with an amphibian (the A-24 Viking) and a two-place tandem twin called the A-36 Vulcan from Russia, along with the lightweight, low-priced A-20 Vista, another tandem two-place LSA-able design, that can be powered by either a two-stroke Rotax 582 or the 912-series powerplants.

On another tier, FPNA also does some parts support for the Drifter, a venerable open-face machine owned by Lockwood Aviation, a neighbor on the Sebring airport.

FPNA's own line of floats is named Waterborne, and these,



too, have unique features that set them apart. The 1600-series floats that are part of the Cape Town feature seven sealed bulkheads (no "Titanic" partial-height bulkheads to allow water transfer or adjacent-compartment flooding) and the amphibians have a patent-pending, electrically-activated pneumatically-operated gear (with a gravity emergency down-and-lock feature).

Flying: Where you finish depends on where you start. And where you upgrade.

Shawn Okun, who runs the FPNA flight school and is one of the owners, is a retired 737/A320 (among others) series captain who holds MEI, CFII, and ATP ratings. FPNA's LSA students



FPNA: Float Planes:

"basically come from two paths. One is dominated by former ultralighters and ultralight instructors who have grown into the Sport Pilot movement; the other is dominated by pilots who, for one reason or another, don't want to take another medical, but who still want to fly." He notes that he's running "the only flight school that teaches all three – PPC, weight-shift, fixed wing – and also land and sea." Other instruction is available, as noted above – all the way through ATP. And, although all levels of instruction are available, the curriculum at each step is identical. Okun says, "I don't think there is a more-professional school anywhere. We've integrated LSA into all our curricula."

FPNA's flight school operates out of FPNA Clearwater Airpark. All instructors can take students from never-flown, through Sport Pilot, and on through advanced degrees. The school and instructors are full Part 141 certified, important even for Sport Pilot ticket-holders, especially if they plan to move to higher ratings.

FPNA Clearwater has a Lasergrade knowledge test facility, and a DPE (Designated Pilot Examiner) on-site, who does no instructing. "Since you can take your tests here and we can schedule them, you don't have a chance to get rusty between your signoff to take the tests and the time you take them."

As Okun notes, "We work hard, but we have a good time."



Maintenance:

FPNA Maintenance runs out of Sebring, Sebastian, and a 22,000 square foot space on the Clearwater airport, where everything from those Cessna and Piper twins to Rotax 912 and 582 can get heavy maintenance. Approved for Rotax repair (and by the time you read this, probably certified as a Rotax Repair Station), FPNA supports Rotax two- and four-stroke engines.



Okun says that due to the integrated business they do, "We're probably the biggest 'LSA' repair station in the world – we have five A&Ps and two AIs" in Clearwater alone.

More about that hardware: the details

On the aircraft side of the business, FPNA is not just an importer/assembler/dealer, but also a manufacturer. Okun believes FPNA is "the only LSA builder that has airline background." This inherent discipline, he believes, aids in keeping everything shipshape: records and quality control, inspections and maintenance, parts and work-order tracking. If it works for the airlines, it can't be insufficient for the little planes; and when you get down to it, it's really all about safety – who wants to cut corners there?

OK, here's the scoop on the imported airplanes:

The Aeroprakt-derived machines include

- the A-20 Vista, with its high-lift airfoil and a choice of Rotax 503, 582, or four-stroke engines in a pusher configuration.



- the A-24 Viking amphibian, which is a 2+1 seater with a 912S, or 80hp 912 optional. It, too, is a pusher and has a non-LSA MTOW of 1657 pounds and an Airmaster constant-speed prop. Though there is just one flying in the US right now, 16 are flying in the Black Sea region, where it is sold as a complete aircraft (rather than a kit). If you're interested, it's a 64% lit here, so it's plenty eligible under Experimental, Amateur-built.

- the A-36 Vulcan experimental twin has a pair of 912S or 912 Rotaxes and Airmaster CS props, its 2-place tandem arrangement features sidestick controls. There's a metal structure with a fiberglass body, and three are flying in the US, so far – two were built by the factory and one was built from a kit.

FPNA's own designs are both LSA and Experimental.

- The A-22 Valor is a versatile, high-visibility LSA, with side-by-side seating. It comes with a long option list, culminating in the uptown "Hampton" package, which includes a GNS 430, glass, a fully-coupled autopilot. It's eligible for day/night VFR, or for use as an IFR trainer. Designed to address heavy flight school use, it also has metal-topped wings.

- A similar, but strengthened and heavier-lifting LSA aircraft is called the Cape Town. With a stripped empty weight of 630 pounds and an MTOW of 1430, this designed-as-a-floatplane machine has a useful load of nearly 700 pounds on straight floats, or about 550 on amphibians. Two are flying now in Alaska. Designed and built very closely to FAR 23 specs, the Cape Town may also be run through JAR-VLA paperwork in Europe, but it's a little early to know how that program will progress.

A word about those floats:

FPNA-designed and -built Waterborne 1600s feature Teflon tapes on the bottom and back for protection when beaching; special-design rudders; 9 bulkheads and 7 sealed compartments. The hulls are made from exotics E-glass and Kevlar. The gear features a single zerck fitting for easy

FPNA: Float Planes:

lubrication and real "aero" wheels and brakes. The gear is CNC-produced in the FPNA factory and then coated in its own powder coat facility, with Epoxy-based powdercoating.

With the Airborne S-LSA weight-shift machines, FPNA offers training, support, and assembly. They handle all the importation, inspection, compliance, and registration. FPNA is also a Powrachute and Pegasus dealer, carrying and servicing the full-lines, and offering training in these fun machines, as well.

Okun, who also used to teach attitude flying and aerobatics, has an overriding philosophy about his machines and his training: "As far as I'm concerned, flying is flying – just because you're flying day VFR in an LSA doesn't mean you don't need a good machine and good pilot skills. When you're off the ground, regardless of what you're in, you're flying." With an eye to more than "immediate needs," he continues, "Even if you never plan to fly in controlled airspace, you need the knowledge and the skills. You need to know how to fly, and fly well. Period. We have a very standardized program, tracked on computer, to know and track every pertinent bit of information. We want to have an excellent training record – we want to match students to instructors; but the curriculum is the same for every student."

Whether you're local or planning a trip to Florida, one of the FPNA facilities should be on your list of destinations. And once you've made the decision to fly, you can probably get your machine from them – and you can certainly learn how to fly it, or fly it better!

More: www.clearwaterairpark.com

