

# First Flight: Van's certified RV-12 S-LSA - A Light Sport Airplane with a golden future

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**Van's certified factory-built RV-12 flies during the U.S. Sport Aviation Expo. Photo: Jim Keopnick**

(SEBRING, FL) At the U.S. Sport Aviation Expo today, I was granted one of the most coveted demo flights on the field when the people from Van's allowed me to spend a few precious minutes aloft in their new factory-built certified RV-12 S-SLA to experience the world of LSA flying for the very first time.

I say coveted, because due to a mechanical issue, the company's demo plane was down on Friday of the show, which seriously jammed the demo flight schedule. This airplane is a very hot item here in Sebring, and everyone wanted to get a taste of what is shaping up to be - in my opinion - one of the most exciting new LSA models on the market right now.

Even with an overbooked demo schedule, room was made for me to give this airplane a quick flight around Central Florida. And without ever flying an airplane with a stick - and never

having flown in any of Van's venerable RV models - I was sure this would be a great experience. And the RV-12 delivered everything I expected...and lots more.

After strapping in, the first surprise was the way the Rotax 912 ULS started. It was clear after about :02 seconds of cranking that this is not your grandfather's airplane engine...it started faster than any automobile engine I've seen. Push the button and with no drama, no levers to coax in and out and no hesitation, it just starts.

Winds at KSEF were quite gusty at flight time, estimated at about 12-20 knots. Taxi out was swift and uneventful...and the RV-12 feels stable on the gear. We were off the runway in a very short time, and at about 300' AGL, demo pilot Mitch Lock gave me the airplane. I mentioned something about never operating a control stick, and he just advised me to use a light touch and don't think about it. And in a matter of seconds, I had forgotten all about the stick, and began to really get into this flight.

There are two distinct features of this certified RV-12 that are immediately apparent. First, the visibility is incredible, reminding me a bit like a Bell 47 helicopter...with unrestricted views as far as the peripheral vision of the human eye allows. This airplane gives you a first-class view of the world as it slides by under your wings.

*But the second thing that the first-time RV-12 pilot notices is the way this airplane handles. There is virtually NO slop in the rigging, it delivers all the good things you've ever heard about the legendary handling characteristics of the Van's line-up. You do not steer this airplane so much as wear it. Think about turning and it turns. I had only been "on the stick" for maybe 120 seconds, and already I was mastering the microscopic control adjustments needed for turning, climbing or descending. I have never experienced such intuitive handling in an airplane. Frankly, it was a little freaky...as if the airplane just knew what I wanted it to do. Chalk this up to fine engineering from a company that has developed a very pleasurable airplane that is a joy to fly.*

Above Lake Jackson just west of the Expo, Lock let me crank in 45 degrees of bank in both directions, and holding the nose level in steep turns was a non-issue. Again...intuitive and predictable. He then demonstrated a stall and at around 40 KIAS, the left wing just barely dipped before the pilot simply released back pressure on the stick and the RV was flying again, with what appeared to be way less than 200' of altitude lost.

On the way back into Sebring, I easily brought the plane back down to 1,100' on the expo arrival, and Lock made a very smooth crosswind landing that looked effortless. One thing of note: I was watching the rudder pedals as he came over the numbers, and saw small adjustments made, no foot stomping needed to keep the RV-12 on centerline.



**Airplanista Editor Dan Pimentel, left, and Van's demo pilot Mitch Lock**

Back on the ground, I exited and was told there was a grin on my face. Of course there was! I had just flown what I predict will be one of the best selling S-LSA models in due time. The certified RV-12s that Synergy Air of Eugene, OR are building for Van's are selling, and they were taking orders for future delivery positions at the Expo.

This affordable and very attractive airplane has the performance numbers to really gain a following of new LSA buyers, as well as pilots like me who own larger legacy airplanes with much higher fuel burn. But the RV-12 really begins to pencil out when flown by flight schools as a serious alternative to the legacy fleet. With each student hour flown, money is saved on direct operating costs, and when schools fill their ramps with this airplane, we'll see more new pilots created when training costs go down.

The future is bright for this factory-built RV-12...it has to be, because GA needs the Light Sport sector to succeed in lowering costs in order to mint more pilots. Growth in the LSA market is coming...that is the message I heard from all vendors at the Expo. And this Van's model will add significantly to that growth. As I walk the show, exciting new possibilities abound, and optimism seems to be building. *And nowhere on the field was optimism more apparent than at the Van's booth, where you could feel the buzz building before your very eyes.*