

Brako Gyro Arrives in New Zealand

Contributed by Leigh Matheson

Another first of type autogyro has appeared on the New Zealand register. Leigh Matheson contributed this article on its arrival and first flights: Leigh writes:

Scattered rain, a low ceiling, poor visibility and gusty wind were the conditions that prevailed at our home in Cromwell on the morning of 20th November 2010, not exactly what we had hoped for. Robyn and I drove to Queenstown hoping that it might clear as the plan was for us to meet Michel and Christel at Manapouri and then fly ZNB back to home base at Cromwell.



The first flight of a Brako Gyro in New Zealand.

THE LEAD UP to this day began some months previously when friends had asked if we might have room in our hangar for a gyro that was due to arrive in NZ from France. With an answer of yes, we were put in contact with a French couple, Christel Diemer and Michel Babou who had just immigrated to NZ. Both avid Gyronauts, Michel is also an autogyro Instructor who is well known in France and together they have imported Christel's tandem 'Brako' gyro which is now on the NZ register as ZNB.

Registering the gyro which was a first of type for NZ, and completing tests for Christel and Michel's licences to fly here had been a process of some weeks, assisted by many willing volunteers in the gyro and microlight communities. Thanks are owed to Ian and Sonya Crook for advice on the processes involved, Murray Hagen for issuing the aircraft's RAANZ paperwork, Tony Hansen for the CAA Permit to Fly, Bill Black for conducting flight tests, and Alan Sheat for the loan of a trailer to transport the aircraft (from Port Chalmers to Manapouri) where all the paperwork was completed.

I was more than a little excited to have been asked to crew as navigator for the ferry flight back to home base in Central Otago. Michel is a very accomplished cross country aviator and had thoroughly planned the route using VFR waypoints,



Approaching The Neck, Lake Hawea below, Lake Wanaka beyond.



Christel Diemer, Bill Black and Michel Babou at Manapouri.

but with the weather being what it was on the day some local knowledge wouldn't be a bad thing.

So while Robyn and I enjoyed coffee and brunch in a Queenstown Café, with the rain persisting and mist hovering around roof tops, I really did not think that flying would be an activity of choice today! Christel's text advised that they had both just passed their flight tests after the weather had cleared enough and that they even had

some blue sky appearing. Things were still 'patchy' but improving so we decided to carry on.

We met Christel and Michel in Te Anau where we discussed the options for the flight back to Central. With several contingency options in hand, we donned our flight suits and climbed aboard the aircraft. Quickly airborne after a 230rpm pre-rotate, we waved au revoir to Robyn and Christel, leaving them to make their way back to Cromwell by road. While the weather had been holding okay, rain was now closing in around us and as we approached the Key we could not avoid it. Cruising at 1,800 Ft AMSL we were below the ceiling, but not by much. Veering a little more west offered clearer skies, so we tracked along the Te Anau – Mavora back road and maintained that heading until the Oreti River appeared out of the gloom. This was a welcome sight as most of the other major landmarks were hiding under a veil of mist.

The rain had now rejoined us and I was impressed at how dry I was in the back seat, the Brako's fuselage and screen shedding 90% of the moisture. We chose to veer downstream and followed the Oreti until Mossburn appeared out on our right.

We raced the NZ Experience tour bus across the Southland plains to Five Rivers, leaving the bus in our wake. I considered who was enjoying their NZ experience the most? The passengers in the air conditioned comfort of the bus

or Michel and I at 1000 Ft AGL, moody views all around and the wind whipping past at 150 km/hr. I'm pretty sure it was us.

The Valley which leads into Nokomai Station passed by and then Athol was approaching. As we could see a significantly brighter sky ahead towards Garston we carried on and were soon skirting Kingston with Lake Wakatipu in an angry looking mood beside us. I gave a position report

on the radio and we followed the eastern lake shore at 2000 ft AMSL. Another call to local traffic at Wye creek brought no response; I guess all the other airmen were debriefing their day in a nice warm room somewhere.

Predictably the 20kt southerly that had chased us up the lake rolled over the Remarkables and gave us a few roller coaster waves until we gained clean air in the Gibston valley. We ducked across "Waitiri Station" and then the roaring Meg and the mining centre passed below. Heading down the Lowburn valley, I pointed out the old DC3 strip up on the Sugarloaf plateau to Michel and we buzzed along its considerable length at 200 ft AGL. Home was now only five minutes away and after a short landing, we taxied up to the hangar and shut down.

We congratulated ourselves on a well planned and executed flight. None of the contingency options had been required, however we both appreciated the comfort of having them available. The flight had taken 90 minutes. I was thoroughly impressed with the Brako as it had been far from ideal conditions and the craft was extremely stable and comfortable. We tucked ZNB into the hangar and went over to the house for a warming cup of tea. Michel went back over to the hangar to check the "consummation" - I figured that he meant the consumption which turned out to be 15 litres/hr.

Headlights appeared in the driveway and the ladies rejoined us. We opened a nice bottle of Sauvignon blanc and celebrated the first cross country flight of a Brako in NZ and the achievement of NZ's two newest Gyronauts. I believe that Christel may be the only active female Gyro pilot in NZ at this time? We debriefed over the meal and it was not long before tired eyes suggested that it was time to wrap up the day. Christel and Michel left for their accommodation in Arrowtown at 11.00 pm and Robyn and I retired to bed. Dreams came easily with a feast of aviation, adventure and good friends to reflect on.

Footnotes:

1. Brako autogyros and trikes are manufactured in Italy by Claudio Pagotto and his team, who have been manufacturing aircraft and aviation components for 15 years. The Brako is beautifully designed and crafted with Italian flair and attention to detail. I have been so impressed with the aircraft that discussions between Michel, Christel, Robyn and myself have resulted in us securing the import and distribution rights for Brako products for NZ, Australia and the Pacific Islands. We now have a website up and running under our new company name, "FREWI" (French and Kiwi). There are some bigger picture aspects to FREWI which will evolve over the coming months, all of which are derived from our mutual passion for aviation, adventure and the unique perspective of our world that Gyronauts enjoy. Have a look at www.frewi.com

2. Christel and Michel now live at Kerikeri in the Bay of Islands. In January, they flew the Brako to Dannevirke and back for the NZ Autogyro Association annual fly-in. A review of the fly-in will appear in the next issue of KiwiFlyer.



BRAKO Gyros - Micro Avionics - Now available in NZ
WWW.FREWI.CO.NZ


 North Island: Contact Michel Babou 021 0247 4355 michel@frewi.co.nz
 South Island: Contact Leigh Matheson 021 743 416 leigh@frewi.co.nz

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