



# Jim Rankin's Gyro Experience

Jim Rankin needs little introduction to aviation enthusiasts in New Zealand. After a 37 year flying career in the RNZAF, Jim has 10,000 hours in his logbook from Tiger Moths to Aermacchi and Hercules, and including "just about everything that flies". He is a civil A-Cat Instructor and Air Force A1 Qualified Flying Instructor, and was Squadron Leader of the Red Checkers for 5 seasons. A passionate aviator, Jim is now also involved with CAA in a part-time safety and training role. Jim says that he has tried most forms of aviation over the years, and has just purchased a hot air balloon. Gyros had always been on his list to do.



Gyrate at Tauranga offer introductory gyro flights as well as professional training and aircraft sales / support. Both open cockpit and fully enclosed gyros are available. Contact Tony Unwin on 0800 FLY-A-GYRO for more information or to book your own introductory flight.

JIM'S previous autogyro experience hadn't been the best. An Air Force colleague had purchased one many years back and flown into Wigram. Then as Jim watched the take-off, his axle broke and the aircraft rolled onto its side with rotors turning, beating itself into the ground in the process. The pilot was fine except for the loss of his aircraft. At the time, the experience reinforced the notion that this was something to be avoided.

Having followed the gyro scene since, Jim was aware that modern gyros are considerably different to the early ones in New Zealand. Gyros have developed like microlights did (Jim was in fact among the first half dozen to fly rag and tube microlights in NZ) and in the same way that microlights of today are a far contrast to the early versions, so to are gyros.

After meeting Tony Unwin from Tauranga-based Gyrate at Warbirds Over



With "just about everything that flies" in his logbook, it was time for Jim Rankin to try a gyro. He recommends the experience and says that "most pilots would be pleasantly surprised".

Wanaka in 2008 when Tony displayed there, Jim resolved to go flying with him, having been "incredibly impressed with the professionalism Tony had shown". (Jim was Display Director for the event.)

### Flying with Tony

On a trip north in 2011, after stopping at Taupo on the way for a skydive, Jim headed to Tauranga to see Tony. They had a great day, culminating in Jim's daughter also going for a ride. In Jim's words: "Tony was very welcoming and we had a good briefing for our flight to and around Mount Maunganui. I was impressed with Gyrate's Eagle gyros and their engineering and build quality looked as good as any production aircraft. My first flight was from the back seat, which is Tony's standard practice such

that passengers get the feeling of the aircraft and gain confidence in the open cockpit environment before transitioning to the front seat. It's not an issue if you have flown open cockpits before but it would be a novel experience for some."

During most introductory flights, Tony demonstrates the aircraft's performance and manoeuvrability, and if requested will simulate an engine failure to a low approach and overshoot on the beach at Matakana Island. Jim says; "I was pleasantly surprised by the performance. It was easy to fly and once in forward flight everything was pretty intuitive. The most difficult aspect was managing the correct increase of rotor speed on our take-off roll such that the ground roll was minimised, ground speed not necessarily having a direct relationship with lift produced."

Controllability also impressed, Jim saying; "They are also very stable and remarkably responsive – it does just what you tell it to. When approaching to land close in behind a 172 it was easy to increase separation simply by slowing down and loitering, then for landing it was easy to place the gyro exactly where you wanted to go. I was also surprised with how easy it was to conduct a slalom exercise around the runway lights – the gyro was very controllable and easy to fly."

Comfort impressed too; "The ride was remarkably smooth for the number of rotating components involved. It was certainly smoother than some helicopters I've flown, with little vibration through the airframe or the controls."

As for utility, Jim concludes that "Gyros are a 'funsy' machine for local air operations. It would be ideal to have one for visiting mates on a nice day. I probably wouldn't buy one myself as I like going upside down way too much, so an aircraft I bought for fun would be aerobatic (though you can really throw gyros around if you want to). Having said that, if there was one available locally that I could fly for fun, then I would happily do so. The performance and operating costs of the new breed of gyros does make them a viable alternative to fixed-wing microlights and light aircraft and if I was flying for fun, then an open cockpit would be just fine. The newer enclosed cockpits probably provide more cross-country utility though I haven't flown one of those yet."

In terms of safety and cost, Jim says that he "never felt the least bit unsafe, partly due to the high professional standards shown by Tony. I was quite happy to let my daughter go flying with him in the gyro. As for cost, they do represent very good value for money when compared with new fixed-wing aircraft of similar performance."

### A recommendation

And a recommendation? Jim says "Yes I'd recommend having a go. You've got to try everything at least once, and I think most pilots would be pleasantly surprised by the experience. I'd highly recommend Tony Unwin for his very professional and friendly approach. He has a real passion for gyros and it really shows."

I also commend Tauranga ATC – they must be some of the best in the country and do a great job dealing with everything from regular commercial turbo-props through flight training, down to a thriving sport aviation community. They were very accommodating of the 'non-standard' ops that we were doing in the gyro."

Footnote: Jim was Organiser of the Ohakea airshow and says he was very pleased to invite Tony to demonstrate at the show. He intends returning to Tauranga for more gyro flying soon. KiwiFlyer thanks Jim for his time with our questions. We're enthusiasts too and it's great to be able to present such a well-qualified viewpoint of the gyro sport.

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