

contributed by Frank Parker

The Trek South

Warbirds Over Wanaka is covered elsewhere in this issue, however I feel it worth giving an insight to NZ Warbirds participating aircraft actually getting to and from the event. Whilst we had the heavy metal brigade attending I'll focus on the Harvard Group. These venerable old girls are probably the only aircraft, both type and individuals, to appear at every Wanaka airshow since its inception in 1988, a noteworthy achievement by any measure.



Chris Gee

AN ADDED consideration for this year's trip to Wanaka was the Air Force Open Day at Ohakea, on the weekend prior to Wanaka. This was an important event, being the 75th Anniversary of the Royal New Zealand Air Force and of the Air Force's longest serving trainer aircraft (well there have been two models of air trainer in case you're counting) invited to their home turf.

Friday 30th March and it's a reasonably early start for the first leg of the journey, Ardmore to Ohakea. Wherever possible we attempt to make this transit flying available to aircraft syndicate members, giving our future pilots the opportunity to participate and hone their cross country and formation skills. With all aircraft two-up including luggage for 10 days in the deep south, the aircraft are well packed. On this occasion the Weather Gods played ball and the transit was one of those easy flights. At Ohakea it was over to the Roaring 40s members to arrange the final practice slots and prepare for the show. At this time our transit pilots become our ground crew, assisting with fuelling, oiling, dieseling (we use diesel to produce the formation 'smoke' - 10 litres per aircraft per show) and then cleaning and picketing. This second tier assistance is invaluable as several of the 40s pilots are involved with other aircraft, and there are the inevitable briefings, liaisons and gossip that attack your precious time.

And then it's show time, six months and many hours of practice expressed in 15 minutes of display. The Manawatu turned on an



Chris Gee

The Roaring 40s Harvards from Ardmore put on superb displays at Ohakea and Wanaka.

uncharacteristic day, all but calm winds and fantastically fine weather. The entire day's airshow activity was only eclipsed by the RNZAF hospitality over the weekend - oh the memories of youth spent within these same hallowed walls!

Monday 2nd April, now time to continue south. The Harvard group had planned a few days based at Ashburton to complete some local formation training within the group. This was appropriate, taking these aircraft to their old stamping grounds, and was well anticipated by the folk at the Ashburton Aviation Museum who always extend a warm welcome. Alas the weather man overlooked the plan and the forecast on the east of the South Island was not good, in fact it was rubbish. So, Plan B via the West Coast to Wanaka for the same activity.

The formation of 6 Harvards departed Ohakea heading south down the Kapiti Coast and crossed the ditch just north of Cook Strait. The weather enabled a very scenic route that

crossed the Marlborough Sounds, Nelson, Murchison, Springs Junction, Lake Brunner and into Hokitika for fuel, where the Strikemaster and L39 were already on the ground and refuelling. There was a big turnout of locals at Hokitika to view the activity



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These exercises are much more than a 15 minute display, there are plenty of logistics and some much appreciated ground support personnel (pictured above) also involved.

and an opportunity for many to get up close and personal with some old aeroplanes. Many kids skipped school for the afternoon to come up to the airfield. After refuels and a bite of lunch the formation departed Hokitika and again had a very scenic trip down the west coast past the glaciers, Mt Cook and then through the Haast Pass to Lake Wanaka.

Several days of intensive formation training in the local Wanaka area saw all pilots getting some valuable currency training and a number of upgrades and checkrides were completed before Thursday came and the airshow action started warming up, Team practice, photo shoots, and the RNZAF made a Hercules available

for some memorable air to air footage - check it out on YouTube.

Then Show Day, Saturday was one of those iconic Central Otago days - not a cloud, a puff of wind nor a bump in the sky and the Team performance clicked. What a time to get it right to the delight of a capacity Wanaka crowd. Sunday was equally as enjoyable, truly a Warbirds over Wanaka weekend to remember. Now we just have to get home to Ardmore.

Monday the 9th April saw a mid-morning start via Rangiora and Wanganui, then to Ardmore. It was a good days flying in continuing genteel conditions.

Ardmore to Wanaka is 530 nautical miles in a straight line, and considerably further if you wish to keep your feet over dry land for as long as possible. For our Harvards, it's around five hours flying each way to give ten hours of transit, plus three hours of display each, as well as additional training flights for approximately 95 hours combined. Over the ten days, in rounded figures that's a total of 12,000 liters of avgas, 200 litres of oil, and 300 litres of diesel, all consumed and enjoyed without a major hitch. All in all a reasonable achievement for a bunch of old grandmothers - and that's the aircraft, not the pilots! Cheers, frankly@xtra.co.nz

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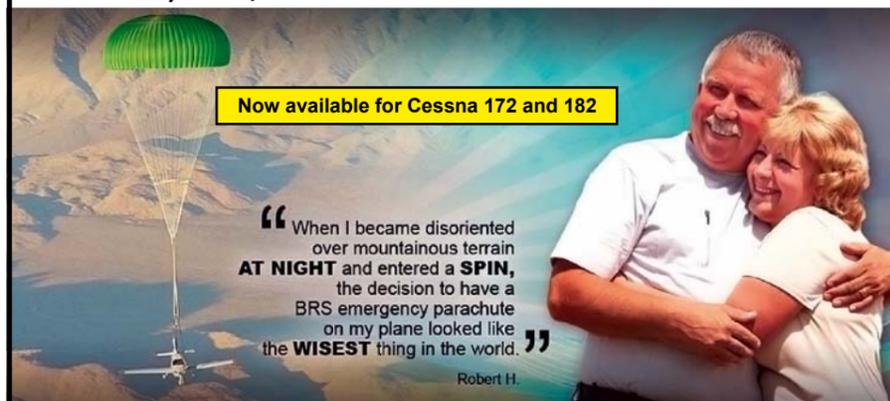
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