

Sport Aviation - A New Golden Era

from Rex Kenny, Manager Sport and Recreation, NZ CAA

When KiwiFlyer spoke to Rex Kenny about a contribution for this page, he accepted the offer without hesitation. Thanks Rex. We also asked for a photo to head the column with, to which Rex provided a picture of his recently completed Sonex, and what a handsome aircraft it is too.

IT IS OFTEN SAID that everything has its time. Going by the quality and quantity of the past issues of *KiwiFlyer* it seems safe to suggest that the magazine has been launched at its "time", and every success to all concerned. When you consider the health of the sport aviation sector, it is hardly surprising that the timing of the magazine launch is appropriate.

History records the golden era of general aviation as the twenty year period between the world wars. The reasons given for such a grand title are many but include:

- An abundance of airshows and air racing.
- Tremendous advances in aviation.
- An era of elegant aircraft design.

Now hang on a minute! With the exception of the air race component (and keep your ear to the ground for a possible 2011 event), are we not in another era which meets all of these mentioned criteria?

If we take the airshow example it is obvious that the events taking place at Omaka, Masterton and Wanaka certainly cut the mustard. Where else in the world could you see three exact replica SE5A's flying alongside a gaggle of Fokker Triplanes, not to mention the Sopwith Camel and a host of other First World War era aircraft. A similar situation exists with the Second World War period aircraft that appear regularly throughout the country. For many of us that "live" aviation it is very easy to take the availability of these magnificent aircraft for granted. In fact, in the words of a well known song, "we don't know how lucky we are."

So it seems we meet the golden era criteria for airshows but what about the second criteria of advances in aviation? The evidence here is also compelling. It

is not too many years ago that the choice of designs for the amateur-builder or prospective microlight buyer was somewhat limited. There were some excellent designs that have stood the test of time well and continue to satisfy the expectations of their owners today and into the future.

Today the choice of make and model is almost endless. Advances in structural materials, composites in particular, have led to the design of clean smooth lines which provide high levels of efficiency and performance. The introduction of modern water cooled

(LSA) category should be in place. LSA's are intended to be two seat aircraft with a gross weight of 600kg. These aircraft are designed and constructed to American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards. These standards are an industry consensus standard, not an FAA standard. This has a significant effect on the cost of certification and therefore the purchase price of the aircraft. The

standards are appropriate and must be fully met prior to a manufacturer offering an LSA for sale. Factory built LSA's are intended to be available for flight training and eventually adventure aviation. Now there's an advancement!

So advancements have been many, covering everything from design to materials and systems. In fact one wonders what can possibly come next. That's the second criteria satisfied.

To achieve a new golden era we must satisfy the third criteria by recognising the current

fleet as elegant. This one is open to interpretation I'm sure, as in my view the Sonex meets the criteria, but I know others will disagree (oh well at least it's fast). Most would agree though that the Vans range of aircraft (yes even the nose wheel ones) have very elegant lines. As does the Lancair, Alpi and many other similar designs. Perhaps the Zenair 701 struggles a little, but it is still well loved. Of course we don't have to look overseas for elegant designs - our own Falcomposite Furio is turning heads in the kit plane market too.

To add to this we also have a number of the elegant aircraft designs from the original golden era, still in operation. So that's number three ticked off.

So there it is. The new golden era of recreational aviation has arrived. In fact it has been here for a while now. Long may it continue and what a privilege it is to be part of it.

Rex Kenny

"With the exception of the air race component (and keep your ear to the ground for a possible 2011 event)..."



Sonex ZK-RMK is an example of an amateur-built Light Sport Aircraft.

four stroke engines have led to significantly reduced operating costs for many recreational pilots.

Perhaps the most obvious advancements have occurred recently in the avionics area. A good example is the "glass cockpit" I have in my recently completed Sonex aircraft. The system provides all engine and flight instrumentation plus GPS. The system weight is almost non-existent and its capabilities are stunning. In the near future an autopilot will be available from the same manufacturer that will couple with the existing system. All of this at a very reasonable price. It's a bit like the TV remote - I will probably never master, (or for that matter become aware of), all of its features. The only downside to these systems is their ability to detract from a good pilot lookout during flight and users must remain vigilant not to fall into this potentially serious trap.

In a few months the Light Sport Aircraft