



# 1929 Simmonds Spartan flying again

IN 1993, BOB McGARRY found the wreckage of a rare Simmonds Spartan in a woolshed near Temuka and bought it for one dollar. Some 8492 hours later, Bob is the proud owner of a fully restored vintage aircraft – one of only four survivors of its type. ABK flew again on 1 November 2008.

## The Story of Simmonds

Simmonds Aircraft Limited was formed in 1928 at Southampton in England. Their objective was to produce and market light aircraft to private owners and flying schools, in competition with the De Havilland company.

The design was exceptional for the time in that Oliver Simmonds pioneered the technique of 'standardisation' for many parts of his aircraft which were of identical construction and made interchangeable left to right. These included the wings which could be fitted to any of the four positions. Aside from simplicity of manufacture, owners needed only stock a representative set of spare parts to keep their aircraft in the air. This design system enabled Simmonds to set up and manufacture 48 aircraft in some 10 months, as well as the original prototype built in a room of his home in 1927.

Simmonds airframes are all wood and with the 120 hp Gypsy Major motor the AWW is specified to be 1000 pounds. Cruise speed is about 75 mph and stall commences at 40 mph with an attack angle of 12 degrees.

Total production of 49 aircraft included three with a three seat configuration, the front cockpit being made longer to accommodate two seats in tandem. ABK is one of these. Unfortunately by the end of 1929 Simmonds succumbed to the great depression and his company was amalgamated with SARO, becoming Spartan Aircraft Limited who over 5 further years manufactured another 17 aircraft similar to the original Simmonds designs.

Aircraft still in existence are two from the original Simmonds factory, both located in New Zealand (ABK at Wigram and ABZ at the Geraldine Transport Museum) and two from the Spartan factory, one in Te Anau and one in England.

## A History of ABK

New Zealand Airways Ltd was formed about 1928 with the objective of running a scheduled service between Dunedin, Oamaru and Timaru, including charter to any part of the Dominion. Their first 'Airliner' was the Simmonds Spartan three seater, ZK-ABK, 'Fleet Number One'.



New Zealand aviation in 1939. ZK-ABK on the day she was sold for five pounds.



Bob McGarry trying the fuselage out for size part way through the rebuild project. The Simmonds airframe is entirely of wood construction.



November 2008 saw a fully rebuilt and restored ABK flying from Wigram. The aircraft had lived, post-crash, in a shed for 53 years before Bob discovered it.

The airframe was erected at Wigram in November 1929 and C of A number 2318 was issued in the same month. ABK had an eventful life suffering a number of engine failures with subsequent major damage resulting in several airframe rebuilds.

When NZ Airways went out of existence about 1934, ABK was sold into

private hands. At the outbreak of war she was flown to the farm of Mr Syd Lister of Temuka and sold to him for five pounds.

In 1940 Charlie Savage sought the services of Instructor Pilot Walter Willmott of Timaru for some dual instruction in ABK with the view that he may have a better chance to become a pilot in the

services. The tale is that after many circuits and landings it was decided that Charlie should be sent up solo. This event was to be the undoing of both Charlie and the aircraft as after many attempts at a landing without success, his last approach appeared to involve closing the throttle as well as his eyes and waiting for the ground to arrive.

This created an additional problem due to private flying having been banned in 1940 and as Charlie had suffered major injuries there would be details the Constabulary needed to know. Charlie's regular transport was by motorbike and this machine was to be his alibi. Progress on beating up the bike with an axe proved to be satisfactory for the Constables inspection. Little did the constable know that just behind the intervening shed rested the remains of ZK-ABK. And there it stayed until being discovered by Bob in 1993. The rebuilt ABK enjoyed her first taste of flight again on 1st November 2008.

## Bob the Rebuilder

After a 40 year career in light aircraft and aero engine maintenance, in 2000 the rebuild of the Spartan became Bob's priority. Arrangements were made to obtain a loan of the airframe of ZK-ABZ which resulted in a 3 year reverse engineering exercise to obtain a drawing set of some 370 pages.

ABK was subsequently rebuilt using all new Spruce timber and Birch plywood. 30 steel items from the original airframe were found airworthy

with the remaining 90% replaced with modern 4130N steel. The airframe was re-covered with Ceconite fabric and taped with faired tapes to the system of 1929.

## ABK is for sale

ABK is now for sale. Contact Bob for more information on [mcgarry@kol.co.nz](mailto:mcgarry@kol.co.nz)