



Ag. Planes Past and Present

Part 5 - Piper's PA-18A Super Cub and PA-25 Pawnee

Piper PA-18A Super Cub

One of the more numerical ag. types to appear here was the nuggetty little Piper PA-18A Super Cub ('A' meaning agricultural adaptation), otherwise known as the 'Little Knocker'. Airwork Ltd of Christchurch imported two of the country's first Super Cubs in 1952 as cropsprayers/topdressers - ZK-AZJ and ZK-AXH, both of which were 135hp (although I believe they may have been re-equipped with 150hp engines.) The Cubs excelled as cropsprayers and seeders in the hands of crackerjack pilots. AJZ was returned to private ownership as a two-seater in late 1958 and is not now on the NZ civil register. ZK-AXH crashed in the Rakaia Gorge (southwest of Christchurch) in late 1954 and was soon after written off.

The 150hp Super Cub, which was basically mixing it with Austers, Cessna 180s, Auster Agricola and Fletchers, had a maximum payload of 800lb. The Super Cub's most productive time here was during the 1960s - I counted a total of 123 Super Cubs registered (to 1969) on my old CAD register, 84 of which were involved in aerial agriculture work as 'A' models.

Piper PA-25 Pawnee

The Pawnee, for me, is one topdresser that looks like it can do the business (Cessna's AgWagon and the big Air Tractor are others). First flying in 1957, the Piper Pawnee was produced in the USA between 1959 and 1982 before being sold to a concern in Argentina.

Nine initial production PA-25-150 Pawnees (150hp), having an ex-factory payload of 800lb, arrived here between 1960 and 1962. One Pawnee '150 (ZK-BWU) had a 180hp engine installed in NZ in 1964. And Pawnee PA-25-150 ZK-BWP, first registered here in

the mid-1960s, was back on the register as a 160hp Pawnee in early 2011, taking up the role of a glider tug.

There are not many old school ag. pilots that did not cut their teeth on the trusty '235 (235hp version). The Pawnee turned out to relish fulltime work at worry level as a cropsprayer. Intended to reduce the pilot's workload, the first of the Pawnees did not have



ZK-BTE was operated by Aerial Farming, Aerial Work and Airspread and is identical to Central Aviation's (Roxburgh) two Super Cubs BNX/BKM, flown by Doug Johnson (Roxburgh) and Peter Bevan (Clyde) that I used to watch in awe at work in the mid to late 1950s. Note the chain strung between the wheel legs of BTE which is there to prevent the legs from spreading (and collapsing) under weight on rough ground. (Dave Paull Photo - 1963)



Pawnee PA-25-235B ZK-CNG (C/n 25-3624), which flew with Aerial Sowing and Airwork, was one of 49 purpose-built Pawnee topdressers to arrive here from 1962. This photograph was taken at Timaru by Bob Kerr in its heyday. CNG is today with the Canterbury Gliding Club as a towplane with a 250hp Lycoming engine under the bonnet. Airwork (NZ Importers) was one of our biggest users of the Pawnee, having 14 of them on line at one time. (John Nicolson Collection)

a constant speed prop (CSU), whereas the later 260hp 'C' and 'D' models had optional CSU or fixed pitch props. Some 235s were re-equipped in NZ (from 1970) with a six cylinder Lycoming 250hp engine. The 235's payload, with its larger hopper is listed at 1,100lb and it has a 630ft/min ROC at MTOW (which isn't brilliant for a topdresser, I suggest).

The Pawnee's standard fuel tank was located just forward of the cockpit - with the small baggage locker. But a couple of local fiery crashes in NZ clearly highlighted the need for that to be changed. Thus the Pawnee 'D' model (the last of type) had its fuel tanks located in the outer wing panels at factory level. And so it was that the NZ Piper people relocated the fuel tanks to the Kiwi Pawnee's wing roots, as is pretty much the norm for GA light aircraft, and upgraded the aircraft's fuel systems accordingly. The fuel tank gap, although tolerably small, was taken up by a buddy seat for the loader driver.

The presence in NZ of the 235/250hp Pawnee 235 sprayer/topdresser, in terms of numbers, began to wain somewhat on the arrival (in 1966) of the much bigger, 300hp Cessna A188 Agwagon. We have 10 Pawnees presently on the ZK-register, none as topdressers. The Pawnee has long settled into its second life as a glider tug - and is one of the most popular tugs in the country.

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