

Record attendance at Whenuapai Airshow

The Whenuapai Airshow took place on the 21st of March. Organised by the RNZAF primarily as a recruitment exercise, at only \$5 per head the show offered an estimated 50000 visitors outstanding value for money. Chris Gee took the photographs and wrote this report for KiwiFlyer.

THE DAY BEGAN with the Kiwi Blue Parachute Team jumping from a C-130, which then began its own handling display. These aircraft are always exciting to watch, especially when they perform the "Khe-Sanh" hostile airfield approach and STOL (Short Take Off and Landing) displays.

Next, the RNZAF Boeing B757 put on a show of power and handling. It was followed by a P-3K Orion from No.5 Squadron dropping rescue packages onto the airfield. It then flew an impressive handling display that served as a reminder of why the Orion is widely regarded as

one of the best Maritime Patrol Aircraft, while also being one of the longest serving airframes (the Lockheed 188A Electra first flew in 1957!). The RNZAF crews are responsible for saving dozens of lives each year within New Zealand's maritime area of interest, an area representing approximately 1/12 of the world's ocean surface.

No.3 Squadron had a large number of their helicopters performing, with several UH-1H Iroquois and B47G Sioux flying in formation, as well as displaying their solo handling skills. All of these ancient but much loved aircraft are soon to be replaced. A "Role Demo" involved a UH-1H inserting an Army squad and forcing "Terrorist" forces off the airfield, under the watchful eye of an orbiting P-3K. The enemy forces were hilarious with their vehicles and 'Rambo' styling.

No airshow in New Zealand would be complete without a precision formation aerobatic display from The Red Checkers and their CT4E Airtrainers. The classic 'Mirror' and 'Spaghetti break' are spectacular. It is a real shame they are unable to deploy overseas as they would surely be an absolute hit at any major airshow around the world.



This year saw the welcome addition of some fast and heavy international guests to Whenuapai in the form of two F/A-18A Hornets from the RAAF and a C-17 all the way from Alaska. For many, the highlight of the show was the F/A-18A high energy solo display at the end of the day.

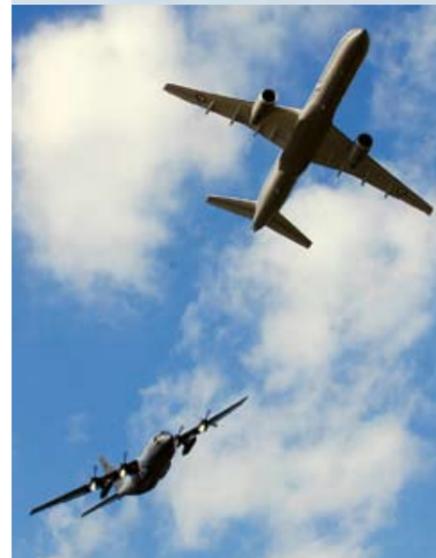
The NZ aviation scene is famous the world over for its variety and rare combinations of aircraft, in particular the huge contingent of Warbirds and Classic aircraft. The Aero Vodochody L-39 Albatross, De Havilland Vampire and Cessna C-37 Dragonfly formed the jet powered part of the Warbirds display, fling in formation and as solo flypasts. The North American AT-6 Harvard has become a mainstay of classic aviation in New Zealand, and these were joined by Yak-52's and Nanchang CJ6A aircraft. The beautiful FG-1D Corsair is the

oldest such aircraft flying today and along with the P-51D Mustang gave a gentle and photogenic display with the sound of their engines bringing back many memories for the senior members of the audience.

Extreme acrobatics was the name of the game for the MXR Technologies MX-2 which seemed to throw out the rule book and defy the laws of physics in an expertly flown display. For many of the public the favourite moment of the MX-2 would have been its 'drag-race' against a V-8 car down the runway, harking back to the classic NZ 'Wings and Wheels' airshows. The 'Wing Walking' Display by a Tiger Moth was also an entertaining crowd pleaser.

Inside the hangers of No. 40 Squadron the RNZAF had stands and stalls displaying all the current career paths available, and a large display of engines and armaments.

This really was an outstanding display of our vibrant aviation scene, marred only by all 50000 people trying to leave the base at the same time. Nevertheless the event is very highly recommended, as is the idea of packing a picnic dinner to eat while you watch the aircraft depart and watch everyone else sitting motionless for hours in their gridlocked cars.



Airshow Picture captions (left column): Harvard waiting to line up as C130-H returns from display; F-A-18A on a full power climb out from a slow pass, then with afterburners at the beginning of its display routine; Red Checkers CT-4E performs a solo display while team members wait in the background; A fast fly-past from the P-51D Mustang. (above column): Formation Iroquois face-off; B737 and C130-H break away from formation flight; Tiger Moth wing walking; C-17A Globemaster during STOL display.

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