

# NZ Autogyro Association Fly-in

**THE MOST** keenly anticipated event of the year in the New Zealand autogyro world is the annual fly-in held at Dannevirke towards the end of January. This year marks my 33rd anniversary of attending this gathering and while I have not been to every annual event, I have kept up with the developments along the way.

### Three Decades Ago

The first time I saw a gyro fly was in 1977 at the Taupo Gliding Club strip. The only machine there was a single place gyro powered by a Hillman Imp engine with a three-blade hand carved propeller. The pilot would fire off down the runway, rotors accelerating (looking not unlike a palm tree in a hurricane) and as he receded into the distance, eyes would be straining... Pretty soon there would be an animated discussion as to whether the wheels did in fact break free of the ground... for a brief moment... maybe. Or not. That's really what it was like.

Contrast that with what we enjoyed in 2010 where one count saw 19 gyros, all but one capable of flight that would have left our intrepid Hillman Imp powered aviator in the dust.

### The New Generation

For over 20 years now we have been remarking how the emergence of the Rotax engine, along with the development of various converted car engines (mainly the Subaru variety), has really advanced our choice of aviation. Saturday morning really emphasised how far we have come when no less than four German built Eagle gyros arrived in a group having made the flight from Hastings, after flying there from Tauranga the night before. The pilots were Tony Unwin, Sid Lane, Hub Hall and Mark Humbke. Some very spirited flying ensued throughout the day, in particular with Sid and Tony practicing their routine for the upcoming Tauranga Airshow. Tony's gyro even had a smoke device fitted. Add to this the great flying done by numerous



Three Eagle gyros arrived in formation from Tauranga via Hastings. Note the magpies joining in the fun.



At left: Grant Simpson commences a steep takeoff from barely a metre of ground roll in his tandem Autoflight Dominator. At right: Oskar Stielau performs for the crowd in his Gyrobee.



John Rochfort has put 87 hours on his immaculate Xenon gyro during the last two years.



The Dannevirke clubrooms provided appreciated shelter during inclement weather. Jim McEwen's Dominator is in the foreground.

### Contributed by Gordon Gibson

other pilots, the fabulous weather and the chance to catch up with old friends; it was a fantastic day for all.

### AGM Time

Sunday and Monday's weather was far less appealing with frequent showers somewhat derailing most of the proceedings. This gave us a chance to hold the AGM on Sunday morning without wasting valuable flying time. First order of the day was a moments silence for Stephen Chubb, our NZAA president who was tragically taken in November 2009. Stephen was very

conspicuous by his absence at this fly-in. His quiet, unflappable and utterly selfless enthusiasm was sorely missed. Always the most likely pilot to be seen endlessly giving rides to interested folk, Stephen introduced many many people to the joys of gyro flight.

Sid Lane won the Man & machine trophy this year, though

because his Eagle MTO gyro was almost sort of identical to the other three Eagles present he had to have done something special to distinguish himself. How about a 5700 km, 40 flying hour trip over seven flying days, circumnavigating New Zealand? Sid told me he went right around the coast too, none of this cutting across corners stuff. He was deeply in awe of some of the rugged and impossible country and seascape he flew over. He referred to his route as the 'Captain Cook' route because mostly he flew pretty much where the good Captain would have sailed. A wonderful achievement.

### Other Weekend Highlights

The only pilot to brave the conditions on Sunday and Monday was Grant Simpson of Taumarunui. It takes a fair bit to keep this guy down. Flying the 2-place Dominator he recently bought from Bill Black of Te Anau, Grant proceeded to strike terror into the heart of every magpie and duck in the vicinity of the airfield.

Another highlight of the weekend was the visit made by John Rochfort

in his immaculate Xenon two-place gyro from Otaki. John has flown over 87 hours in the nearly two years he has owned this beautiful machine. The more grass roots operators were ably represented by the likes of veteran pilots Jim McEwen from Tauranga in his Dominator, Gary Skudder from Rotorua in his RAF 2000 and Ken Middleton in his Dominator from Marton. Dudley Welcome and Paul Shearer flew very well and added to the mix with their own single place machines. Oskar Stielau flew the billy-o out of his little Gyrobee - a very buildable and affordable machine.

One of the other keen Dominator pilots, none other than the editor of this magazine, did not actually bring his gyro to the event. However it was obvious (to those who know how to read the signs of such things) that he soon displayed the telltale distracted tetchiness of someone who had left home in Auckland full of bravado about "not worrying about bringing his gyro" to the fly-in, only to jolly well wish he had in fact done so. The situation was soon alleviated when he was offered a fly in one of the other Dominators present and he proceeded to bore holes in the sky with obvious delight.

As was pointed out several times during the wet days, because we are so spread out as an association and because most of us only see each other once a year, it is great just to be able to sit and talk. Any actual flying, while a bonus, is often a secondary consideration for many of us. All I have to do next year is pitch my tent further away from anyone who might be given to high decibel snoring. And find a better thing to tie my 18 month old Labrador to than one of the tent guy ropes.



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