

SportAvex and the Tauranga City Airshow

Contributed by Gordon Gibson

FOR Waitangi weekend 2010, the biennial SportAvex fly-in event of the Sport Aircraft Association was marketed on one hand as SportAvex for sport flyers and on the other hand as the Tauranga City Airshow, the latter being organised by Classic Flyers NZ who also own and operate the Aircraft Museum and Conference Centre at Tauranga Airport.

Classic Flyers CEO Andrew Gormlie said before the event; "We are confident that, with the support of the Tauranga City Airshow branding, this event will grow into a major biennial summer attraction in the Bay of Plenty. Our intention is to earn a very positive reputation for the event over coming years, to provide an additional welcome boost for tourism in the Bay."

Andrew's confidence was well founded. Trade stands and display aircraft were plentiful, and there was much for the claimed 20,000 attendees to watch and do during the weekend.

Thankfully there was still a strong presence of the Sport Aviation Association ethos that you can 'dream it, build it, fly it' with regard to your own aircraft. What a wonderful freedom we have in our country being able to do this.

An Informative Seminar Programme

An interesting and broad range of seminars were run throughout the event. The entire programme was very informative and well presented, my only regret being that I could only attend a few of the several seminars on offer myself. Comments from those who attended the others were universally positive, matching my own experience.

The mountain flying seminar progressed by outlining a series of potential hazards that are ever-present in mountain flights. Things

like straight out terrain avoidance (perhaps obvious but look at how many times it has occurred), the potential lack of horizon in that flying environment, other visual illusions, wires and structures, weather, wind, cloud, turbulence and aircraft performance.

It's a huge thing folks and any pilot who thinks he/she is going to go barging around in an aircraft in the high country without due care and diligence... really in many instances they are just an

accident looking for a place to happen. The audience was left with a strong awareness of how much there is to know about this important subject. After all, the pilot's job is to make every flight a good safe one so that passengers (and the pilot) want to repeat it. There were quite clear indications that there are mountain flying rule changes in the wind, very soon in the helicopter training syllabus and by 2011 in the fixed wing syllabus.

On Saturday a Rotax engine seminar was presented by Rotax Dealer, Colin Alexander from Solo Wings. Colin began by informing everyone that while it is true that Rotax have increased the TBO of their engines to 2000 hours, a great majority of NZ engines will not be in that category yet due to not having

new style crankcases. Only the very latest models are to be included in this new classification. We learned more about the importance of maintenance care and how to avoid some quite prohibitive costs by paying more attention to preventative maintenance. This approach costs much less in both dollars and inconvenience in the long run.

I attended an informative seminar by Rochelle West who is a flight instructor at Wellington Aero Club and also a travelling ambassador for the Met Service. There was much to learn about modern methods of weather forecasting using radar and now even infrared technology. One thing I found out that at distances of 250 km or more, due to the curvature of the earth, radar actually



Tauranga Airshow scenes: People, homebuilt helicopters, aerobatic planes, jets, wargames, airfield attacks and much more including microlights and LSAs.



only paints from about 20,000ft and up. In many other cases stuff like drizzle can be below the radar beam at the best of times. We learned a lot about how to analyse satellite pictures, discovering that *albedo* is not how sexy you feel, but is the word describing reflectivity of clouds in a satellite picture. Likewise *virga* is not what you might think either, it is rain that is so light it evaporates before it gets to the ground. Infrared is useful for night pictures but it is important to realise that neither of these two methods give any indication of what is happening at the base of clouds. For best results the two methods need to be used in conjunction.

Airshow Day

Finally the Airshow itself was held over six hours on the Sunday. What a turnout it was, with a wide range of beautifully restored and presented flying aircraft, along with much more modern types doing their thing. Sweltering conditions (well it is the Bay Of Plenty in the summer) were alleviated somewhat by a handy sea breeze. There was little else to do except sit back and let wave after wave of excitement roll on through. As someone who has attended many air shows in several different countries (I decided long ago that attending these types of events is one of my passions), it really was brought home how far ahead of many other countries we must be with our diverse range of aircraft available for demonstration in this way.

And all so close and accessible too. Everything from a Catalina to gliders, a top dressing plane flown by a man who has over 30,000 hours doing same and who, after approximately 400,000 takeoffs and landings (between 10-15 per hour while working) it is said he has an indentation of the control stick grip permanently in his hand, a Mark IX Spitfire recently restored and carrying so much glory, majesty and emotion, (well at least for those of us there who have some idea of what it represents), a Corsair, a P51-D Mustang, a two-thirds scale Thunder Mustang that consistently threatens to

out perform the 'real' one, several 75% Titan Mustangs, a brace of Kittyhawks, A Dakota nearly 70 years old, three highly aerobatic machines capable of what should be impossible, helicopters, three Autogyro's with a wonderful display routine... I need to pinch myself before I go on.

Three jets all privately owned (the only way to see a military jet flying in this country now), Balloons, Harvards, Yaks by the shopping trolley load, the breathtakingly beautiful Furio, built in Auckland and oh how it flies. It is worth a visit to the Furio website

just to see how incredibly few pre-moulded composite parts are needed to build the airframe.

There were pyrotechnics, a mock airfield attack, and a race between an Audi sportscar and the Cessna A37. Even the gentleman who had mounted a 1300 horse power Allison V-12 on a trailer and who gave frequent running displays had his share of many interested onlookers.

In conclusion

I could continue but you get the idea. It was a contented, satisfied crowd who straggled along to the exit gates late in the afternoon.

From all who attended, Thankyou to the organisers. Sure there are things to improve on for next time - Some attendees on Saturday didn't realise that the

airshow proper was only on the Sunday and were less than pleased that their ticket price covered the whole weekend, regardless that they couldn't attend on Sunday. And a number of trade exhibitors felt their presence was somewhat lost amongst ice cream stands and carnival activities. It's an age old problem of how to draw the line between the dual attractions of a trade show for aviators and an airshow for Mum, Dad and the kids.

That said, these are easy problems to correct for the next event. The organisers are to be congratulated for their promotional efforts and for bringing so much together, and so many people to Tauranga Airport for a most enjoyable weekend.



Tauranga Airshow scenes: P-51 and T-51 Mustangs, trade stands, demonstrations and a new tandem twin engine from Autoflight in Hamilton.

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