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Boomerang reborn

Boomerang Fighter Restoration

BY MATTHEW DENNING

It might have taken 27 years to rebuild a rare WWII Boomerang fighter aircraft to flying condition, but all the blood, sweat and tears was worth the effort.

What started out as a stripped tubular steel fuselage frame in a paddock in the mid 1970's has now reverted to a pristine example of Australia's own home-grown fighter of 60 years ago.

The Boomerang was when Australia faced the threat of invasion within weeks of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. However Australia had little in the way of defensive fighter cover. With no chance of getting aircraft from overseas, the task of filling this shortfall was left to the fledgling design team at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation located in Melbourne.

The company already had the Wirraway trainer in production, however in a little over 16 weeks they had taken their new fighter design, the Boomerang, from drawing board to first flight – a remarkable achievement by world standards.

Some 250 Boomerangs were produced by CAC between 1942 and 1945. Despite the limitations of time and resources the Boomerang proved to be quite agile in the



'Suzy-Q' gets refuelled at Archerfield.

air, had good initial climb performance and was a steady gun platform for its two 20mm Hispano cannons and four Browning .303 machine guns.

Boomerangs were used extensively in New Guinea, providing air cover to ground troops, directing artillery fire and acting as lead-in aircraft for other fighter-bombers. Australia's northern and western coastlines were also protected by Boomerangs.

Suzy-Q

The newly restored example, with RAAF serial no. A46-122, had spent its entire service career with No.83 Squadron and for a period during 1944 had been based at Gove and Milingimbi islands in the Northern Territory providing escorts to shipping convoys in the Arafura Sea. It was the mount of pilot Paul Bash, who also nicknamed his aeroplane "Suzy-Q".

At the end of the war, the Boomerangs were considered obsolete and little thought was given to preservation for future generations. "Suzy-Q" along with 38 other Boomerangs joined hundreds of Spitfires, Kittyhawks and Mustangs at Oakey air base, west of Toowoomba, Queensland and sat in the long grass for three years before being sold off as scrap metal.

By late 1948 all that remained of many Boomerangs were the stripped fuselage frames which were sold off to some of the local farmers for 1 pound each, providing bolts, tubing and electrical wiring for repairs around the property. The farmers were unaware at the time that they were helping to preserve an important part of Australia's aviation history.

Fast forward to the mid 1970's when a teenager by the name of Matthew Denning whose interest in old aeroplanes lead him to the opportunity of buying a large portion of a WWII fighter from an aircraft parts collector.



Boomerang continued

Thirty dollars later and the battered Boomerang fuselage was returned to Matthew's suburban home at Mount Gravatt in Brisbane.

Little was left on the frame to identify it until a stencilled serial number was found on the inside of one of the remaining panels. Since those early days, a remarkable journey of discovery unfolded where, as spare time allowed, many car and truck trips were made to other locations up and down the east coast of Australia in search of the missing parts. Friendships were forged with other collectors, skills learned to undertake the restoration work and many characters met along the way.

The rebuilding effort required was enormous as the Boomerang incorporated just about every known aircraft construction method and material – welded steel tube fuselage, timber shell, riveted aluminium wings and tail and fabric covered control surfaces.

Authentic

A great deal of care was taken to rebuild the Boomerang as authentically as possible, including the camouflage paint and original cockpit fittings. The only concessions made were to install modern avionics and an upgraded electrical system.

The Boomerang's owner Matthew Denning is very grateful of the support provided by Air BP as the aircraft's 30 litre Pratt & Whitney R1830 Twin Row Wasp engine is quite thirsty, developing 1200 horsepower on take-off but also consuming about 10 litres of fuel per minute in the process.

Fortunately at cruise power settings the fuel burn reduces to a more respectable 140 litres per hour (still a fair bit more than your average Cessna).

Reunited

To date, with Air BP's assistance, Matthew has been able to fly "Suzy-Q" to various venues, including southern NSW where many former veterans from Boomerang squadrons have been reunited with this old fighter which they once flew or worked on.

It has also provided the opportunity for many of our younger generations to see, hear and experience this unique Australian 1940's aircraft in flight. Matthew's Boomerang is only the second to have returned to airworthy status since the end of the war, the other having been operated by Aerotec, Toowoomba since 1992.

SAAA Easter Pageant

Over the Easter weekend, the skies above Wagga Wagga filled with the sound of over 135 experiential aircraft, as sport aircraft enthusiasts from all over the country enjoyed the National Convention and Fly-in of the Sport Aircraft Association of Australia.

This is the major event of the year for homebuilders and sport aircraft enthusiasts, giving them the opportunity to view other aircraft projects and compare notes with this fascinating group of aeronautical aficionados.

The 500 who attended the event were treated to fine settled weather.

This year was a special occasion, marking the formation of a partnership between Air BP and the Sport Aircraft Association of Australia (SAAA) as they combined forces to promote aviation safety.

Forums, covering a wide range of subjects were well attended. These included; changes to airspace, operation into aero-



RV-8 VH-RCE built by SAAA member Ray Jarvis, Hong Kong. Flown to Wagga Wagga by Jon Johanson – around-the-world aviator and Chief Judge of aircraft at the SAAA National Convention 2003.



VH-AEQ Rotorway Exec 162A helicopter. Builder SAAA member Peter McDougall, Victoria. AEQ, one of six rotorways to line up for the National Convention Wagga Wagga 2003.

dromes in conjunction with regular public transport, aircraft building techniques such as metal work, welding, riveting, composites and the all important subject of keeping the engine running where Air BP's own John Petch gave a very enlightening presentation on the properties and advantages of Air BP fuels and oils.

The SAAA is a body that represents many diverse aspects of sport flying. The Association welcomes any high flyer to join and enjoy the benefits of belonging to a group that will not only represent the sport flyer at Government level but will also provide companionship, support and the technical skills required to build, fly and maintain the aircraft of your dreams.

The Association would like to thank Air BP for their support and looks forward to a close working and flying relationship over many years as both parties work towards the continued promotion of sport aviation and flight safety.

The SAAA can be contacted on Ph: (03) 9482 4716, Email: enquiries@saaa.com or visit our website <http://www.saaa.com>

Avalon 2003

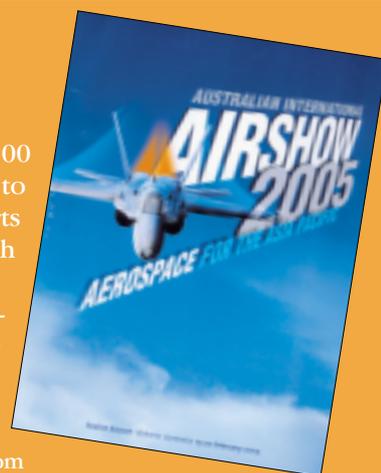
The Australian International Airshow celebrated 100 years of powered flight in fine style. The entrance to Avalon Airfield was dominated by the aircraft parts carrying, 'Beluga' A300-600ST, a static display with commanding presence.

A major defence contingent displayed the latest in military hardware, the US fighter The Super Hornet displaying its prowess in the skies during the flight displays across the Avalon week.

A majestic aerial display of the Warbirds added to the celebration of the centenary of flight, as did replicas from WWI and other historic aircraft.

General Aviation was present mainly in static form, Aircraft Manufacturers including; Gippsland's Airvan, who have won a major contract to supply the US Civil Air Patrol aircraft for surveillance search and rescue missions; Cirrus and Diamond to name a few, not to mention the flight schools and clubs in attendance.

Airshows DownUnder are now working on the 2005 Airshow – Aerospace for the Asia Pacific, Avalon Airport Victoria Australia, 15 – 20 February 2005.



Aero club's scholarships jump start careers

The Hawkes Bay and East Coast Aero Club held their annual scholarship evening in April this year

Applicants for the scholarship are made eligible by completing an Introduction to Flying covering basic theory and a trial flight in one of the Aero Club's planes with a senior instructor. The scholarship allows the recipient to get a jump start in their flying career and is seen as an important part of the Aero Club's recruitment.



Scholarship winners with Todd Maddock of Air BP NZ

From the pool of applicants six scholarship winners are selected. This year five \$1000 Air BP Scholarships were awarded to; Mads Thorvald Slivsgaard, Derwent McPhee, Ryan Healy, Serge de La Ray Swardt and Rick Townshend and one scholarship of \$500 which went to Adam Banks.

The presentation took place in the newly commissioned Hawkes Bay and East Coast Aero Clubs new building, opened just hours before the presentation.



The new clubhouse

The Omaka Airshow was held in Blenheim (in the South Island) over Easter 2003. Jonty Mills and Jim Burson from Air BP Christchurch enjoyed helping out with the refueling of a row of replica Fokker Triplanes.



Peter Jackson's restored Sopwith Camel.



Omaka Airshow

Reef Helicopters takes national safety award

Cairns-based helicopter company, Reef Helicopters, has received a national award for Excellence in Aviation Safety, presented by the industry's peak safety organisation, Aviation Safety Foundation Australia.

In recognising Reef Helicopters, AFSA said the company "continued to demonstrate consistent and outstanding professional conduct, with a high regard for safety, personnel management and training". Australia's first woman commercial pilot, aviation pioneer and former student of Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, Lady Nancy Bird-Walton, presented the award at a gala dinner held in Melbourne

David Earley, chief executive officer of Reef Helicopters said the company was honored to receive the award, describing the award as "as a very pleasing marker along the way". He acknowledged the part that all Reef Helicopters staff had played in the achievement of the award, whilst emphasising that "the culture of Reef Helicopters was to view safety as a journey, not a destination."

"As a result of operating and maintaining helicopters over such a wide variety of specialised air operations, we've built up a great deal of first hand experience, technical prowess and detailed knowledge, which can only be acquired through many years in the industry" Mr. Earley said.

Reef Helicopters was founded on Thursday

Island in 1990 and has expanded to a fleet of eight helicopters operating from five bases in North Queensland. In 1994, Reef Helicopters won the Australian Customs Service contract for the provision of the Coastwatch helicopter service in the Torres Strait. This nine-year contract involves both day and night flying and utilises sophisticated infrared electronic equipment to provide 24 hours a day coastal surveillance. They handle transportation and observation requirements for Coastwatch customers such as Customs, Quarantine, Fisheries, Immigration, Police and Foreign Affairs.



Lady Nancy Bird-Walton presenting award to Mr David Earley, CEO Reef Helicopters

Reef Helicopters also operates Helicopter Emergency Medical Services for the Queensland Department of Emergency Services and maintains hangar facilities on Thursday Island and Horn Island for those operations. "The purpose of the service here is to support the medical and emergency rescue needs of Torres Strait and northern Cape York communities," Mr. Earley said.

With a diversity of operations including marine pilot transfers between Mackay and Blossom Bank, 112 km offshore of Mackay, personnel transport, sling and external hoist operations, aerial survey and inspections for Telstra out of their base at Normanton, and helicopter pilot training at Cairns, this north Queensland company is gaining a national reputation.

(For further information contact: David Earley, (07) 4034 9420)

FUNDRAISER

On the road again for Variety

BY CLIVE LIPSCOMBE

The Variety Club Newcastle Hunter has completed The Bash for 2003!

This annual event raises much needed funds for sick, disabled and disadvantaged children in the Newcastle and Hunter Valley Regions. The event is well supported Australia wide by entrants and sponsors alike. Cars who enter the bash include those of up to 1965 vintage.

Sixty Bash entrants departed Newcastle on Sunday May 18 for a week of fun, special moments and comprehensive touring of regional and rural NSW. The Bash stopped to make financial pledges at a number of locations including the children's hostel in Cobar and a public school in Canowindra.

An evening's entertainment at Muswellbrook saw pledges of more than \$20,000 being given to worthy charities in the district. The 2003 Bash ended on a high note at the inaugural Morpeth Variety Festival. The main thoroughfare of Morpeth closed to cater for all the cars and an evening of entertainment – a 60s night, including the voice of John Paul Young, patron of Newcastle Variety.

Air BP was proud to be one of the sponsors of the Rotorway Crew who provided a helicopter for the event. In addition to being the safety aircraft for the event and providing footage to local TV outlets, the crew raised \$12,500 through joy flights.



NETWORK NEWS

AUSTRALIA Staff Happenings

We welcome Rob Vandermeer to the role of Marketing Development Manager Asia Pacific. Rob returns to Air BP after a number of years, his most recent working experiences being in Belgium and the UK.

Sue Bailey and Rob Bochen welcomed the early and safe arrival of Kate Isobel in early February.

Elite News

Welcome to Mike McKenzie Mike started in the role of General Accounts and is now taking on WA Premium Accounts.

Congratulations to Samantha Kane who went away for some annual leave to Fiji and came back married to Cam!

Congratulations Yvonne and Miro Surma on the recent safe arrival of a little girl.

NEW ZEALAND Staff Happenings

Katrina Brinsden joins the team as Aviation Support Officer, replacing Angela Burton-Brown. Ange has moved into a Project role within the Aviation team.

Peter Gallen is returning to NZ from Canada, where he was the Country Manager for Air BP. He will be taking over the NZ Aviation Manager role from Justin Walker.

Justin succeeded Geoff Howse as Technical & Operations Manager, Air BP North Americas in August. Congratulations to Peter and Justin, we wish them well in their new respective endeavours.

EAST TIMOR

Helio de Lemos has taken extended leave from Dili for the imminent arrival of his first child in Australia. We wish Helio and Natercia the best for a safe arrival. Florencio Sanches has taken over the reins, we welcome Florencio to Air BP.

Coming Events

AUSTRALIA

Warrnambool

Welcome to John Franc who has taken over the Warrnambool Agency from Malcom Sharp. We thank Malcom for his many years of hard work and wish him well.

New contact details:

Phone: 03 5565 9139

Fax: 03 5565 9135

Mobile: 0417 546 709

email: wblairport@bigpond.com

Halls Creek

Farewell Sue and Geoff McGlasson and thanks for running the Halls Creek agency. Welcome Tom O'Dwyer to Halls Creek.

New contact details:

Phone: 08 91686007

Fax: 08 91686235

Mobile: 0407 993407

email: charlie@hcshire.wa.gov.au

Newman

Welcome David & Christine Pollard to Newman. Thanks Rod and Debbie Evans for your time and commitment to the agency.

New contact details:

Phone: 08 9175 0474

Fax: 08 9175 0474

Mobile: 0438 920 048

AH Phone: 0417 171 018

email: polar@westnet.com.au

Parafield

Please note Parafield now has an Avgas bowser available.

Townsville

Please note a change to Townsville's fax number. It is now (07) 4779 4339.

Dubbo

Welcome Michael Van Emmerik to the role of Dubbo Airfield Representative.

Contact details:

Phone: 02 6885 4599

Mobile: 0419 767 200

NEW ZEALAND

Waiouru

A new Jet A1 Self Service pump has been installed at the Army airfield in Waiouru. The Pump is 24hrs and is unattended.

EAST TIMOR

Revised contact details for the East Timor branch:

Tel: International 0011 670 390 322 588
Local 322 588

Mobile: 0011 670 724 0332 Florencio Sanches

Mobile: 670 723 3049 Arcenio Goncalves
Email: airbpdili@yahoo.com.au

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