

“BEST RAAus WOODEN AIRCRAFT”

WINGS OVER WAGGA – 2005

Introduction

The Recreational Aviation Australia (RAAus) network responded to the call for members to support the Sports Aircraft Association of Australia (SAAA) “Wings over Wagga” convention in the last weekend of October, 2005.

An element of the “fly in” was the parading of owner built aircraft, with prizes awarded for the best of the entries in a variety of categories. There were specific awards for RAAus registered aircraft. This story is about my entry – an Alpi Aviation - Pioneer 300 – winner of the “Best RAAus Wooden Aircraft” judged at the weekend.



Presentation to Melbourne based Barry Pendleton (Author) by Paul Middleton (Executive Director RAAus) in front of the prize winning Pioneer 300

Needing to Fly

I have been an aviation enthusiast all my life. I never got around to flying until the kids were older and nearly through school. Obtaining a PPL was good news and to hire a plane for a trip was rewarding. However, flying was, and still is, an expensive hobby, especially in the GA environment. What were the alternatives, yes, get your own plane, continue to hire or give it away all together. Well it is obvious what to do if you are an “enthusiast”, get your own.

I had searched the magazines, spoken to many other enthusiasts. Saw many and was referred to countless other types of airplanes but... there was always something not quite right. Too expensive to buy and run, looked like a mistake rather than an airplane, or just not quite right.

My non flying partner, Julia, keen to see her “mate” engaged in his dreams, returned home from a trip to Christchurch with an airplane calendar of planes of New Zealand. July was a significant month – two Pioneer 300s, flying alongside each other. Further, there was an email address with contact details for one of the pilots. This plane looks like a plane and it looked as though it would “fly”. Enough to really whet the appetite and to set the adrenalin surging.



As chance had it, Julia and I were off to NZ in September, a surprise for Julia's mum's 70th birthday. Time was set aside to meet up with Alpi Aviation's Australasian Agent, Logan McLean.

Logan, an unassuming character was all business. After the pleasantries we climbed into his demonstrator Pioneer 200, his 300 demonstrator at the time, had been sold. I explained I was really interested in the 300, not the 200. Logan's response was, "To see a 300, we fly a 200". Does that make sense. It turned out that way... leaving Whangarei, two hours north of Auckland (by road) we flew down the west coast just above the cliff tops, surfing the strong south-westerly as it rose off the sea and over the cliffs. What an experience – have you ever dragged the throttle back, almost to idle, in an effort to stay below the Vne. Logan certainly knew how impress a man from the "West Island" - Melbourne. I flew the 200 south past Hamilton to a farm strip – on the side of a big hill and there to meet us was "PLG", one of the planes from the calendar.



Logan's Pioneer 200 Demonstrator

I got to touch and feel this 300, even taxied it around the farm. It was a Jabiru powered Pioneer 300 and it sounded delightful. We didn't fly the 300 that day, the weather was really bad – don't know how Logan landed the 200 at the farm in the first place – hell he could fly.

A day or so later we did the trip south again, this time landing west of Hamilton at another farmer's strip. A huge tree at the end of the strip and a permanent open drain across a third of the strip about halfway down its length. Here I got to fly the 300. A brand new Pioneer 300 with fifteen hours on the clock, straight out of the Alpi factory in Italy.



The search was over... This is a plane that looks like a plane and it really did “fly”. Haven't heard anyone, who have flown this plane, say they didn't enjoy the experience.

UK Kit

There and then I decided I was going to own one of these planes. A Factory built plane was an option however Alpi Aviation was still organizing the appropriate regulatory clearances to allow factory completed aircraft into Australia. Buy a kit. RAAus had already approved the Pioneer 300 kit and it is on the “Approved Register”. Alpi provide two kit versions, an advanced kit for the building enthusiast and a UK kit for those who want to build and fly quickly. I decided on the UK version which would give me the opportunity to really get to know the “ins and outs” of my plane.

The UK Kit is so name because the version is prepared to meet the Popular Flying Association (PFA), United Kingdom's regulatory parameters. Meeting the 49-51% rule and the RAAus requirements. After speaking with the staff at RAAus I went ahead and placed an order for the UK kit and nominating a number of extras to ensure that what I got was a complete aircraft – I didn't need to source bits and pieces locally. Must mention though, the Engine I had decided would be purchased direct from Jabiru in Bundaberg.

April the 20th, 2005, the twenty foot container arrived securely packed with the kit. There was great excitement at this point... and apprehension for now I had to put into action what I was telling people. I had never built a real aeroplane before, only models. My concerns were unnecessary – the container was full of items and plastic bags, all number. A check of the inventory and builders manual quickly dispersed my concerns as the assembly process was based on kit bag numbers. “To install the undercarriage, find kit bag xxx ...” Yes, the kit bags contained all the items required to complete the nominated task, including bolts, nuts and washes. The builders manual was in clear English with photographs and drawings.

The frame of the aircraft is a boxed wooden frame encased in a carbon-fiber shell. The wings are of wood with a wooden boxed main spar extending to the wingtip. Plywood is fixed to the leading edges and then covered with Dacron material. Done correctly and the finish comes up like glass – Logan McLean made a special trip over from New Zealand to show me his technique in fabric covering. The electric wheel retraction system is very smart enabling the wheels to transition in about six seconds and the electric flaps can be set to any transitional position. Many people with ultra light aircraft encouraged me to ensure that I install an aileron trim. I did this and it is a very useful control tool allowing me to trim the plane on all three axis.

I purchased the Jabiru 3300 six cylinder engine about half way through assembly of the kit. The engine arrived promptly and the assistance afforded to me by the Jabiru people was wonderful. Their patience with my queries and the advice and assistance presented was received with extreme gratitude. Their welcome and generosity was again exhibited when I later flew to their Bundaberg facility. Well done Jabiru.

After four and a half months of assembly the “P300” was ready for shipment to an airfield. Yes, four and a half months from receipt of the container on the 20th of April to being delivered to Lethbridge Airfield. The final assembly, complete systems checks and final inspection to a further three weeks. The arrival of the Pioneer at Lethbridge certainly created a lot of interest with a lot of preparation delayed caused by enthusiasts wanting to get a good look. Word spread quickly as people drove and flew in from all over the State. Even had one guy from Brisbane pop in – said he was passing by.

First Flight

The Australasian Agent for Alpi Aviation, Logan McLean said that he would do the first test flight for me. There are some techniques required that the pilot needs to be familiar with and as a first flight some experience would be handy. Logan decided to fly his Pioneer 300 across the Tasman – the first Jabiru powered ultra light to do so, and that’s another story.



Picture - Logan McLean and his “P300” ZK-SHL at Lethbridge

He wanted the same aircraft handy to carry out the systems inspection. You understand, you absolutely know one flies, therefore it's "dead ringer" must also fly. Well that's what we did, compared the two aircraft to ensure that they were basically identical. She certainly did fly. After a bit of a fly around and couple of circuits Logan put me in the "Captains" seat and gave me some lessons. Undercarriage coming up, approach attitudes etc. etc. and then solo...



Picture - Barry and his Pioneer 300 at Lethbridge AirPark

As "we" intended to place the plane on show at "Wings Over Wagga", I needed to get the test fly period out of the way – and I took every opportunity to get the hours up. I was afforded a special dispensation in case I didn't fly off the 25 hours with the RAAus nominating me a corridor through to Wagga Wagga.

Wagga Wagga Attraction

Both my kit built and Logan's factory built planes were placed on display. The interest generated in the two aircraft was incredible. Logan decided to provide test flights for those interested and was kept busy putting his plane through it's paces. We had queues of people wanting a closer look and information.

I too have wandered around air shows looking at the various planes on show – and wishing. Well I found my airplane, put it together and I am flying it. It's a great feeling.

Conclusion

Now that I've got over 40 hours clocked up I can safely say the plane flies like a dream. Returning from Bundaberg I was cruising at 130kts IAS and burning approx 22 lts. an hour. A cheap way to travel and see the country from a different perspective.

Enthusiasts wishing to contact me can email me at – tombarry50@hotmail.com or phone 0416 020 553