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Number 195

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Airtourer Association Newsletter



Dedicated to the preservation and continued airworthiness of
Victa and AESL Airtourer and derivative series aircraft

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Articles for inclusion in the Newsletter should be submitted directly to the Editor at the contacts listed above. Contributions and or advertisements for the next issue need to be received by 21 April 2026. Advertisements are free for Association members.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Publishers, the Airtourer Association or the Airtourer Co-operative Ltd.

Cover: All smiles on Julian Szater’s face as he flies over Silvan Reservoir in the Yarra Valley in his CT-4B VH-PGH.



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From the President

by **Deb Evans** (Victa Airtourer 115, VH-IOF)

I want to take this opportunity to reflect on what has been an extraordinary 2025. It has been a year of growth, connection, and achievement and none of it would have been possible without your passion and commitment to our shared mission. The commemoration of the 50 years of CT-4s in Australia was extremely well-attended; this was due to the inordinately challenging work of Angela Stevenson and Tony Self. I would like to thank Chad Summers, who became our delivery point for all items that were needed for the event, it was substantial.

As we have now stepped into 2026, I would like to extend my sincere wishes to all members for a year filled with new hopes, fresh starts, and amazing achievements. I hope the festive season brought you time to relax, reconnect, and recharge with family and friends. With the year now well underway, it is timely to share an update on our activities and outline some important milestones ahead for the Airtourer Association

Mark in your calendar our 4 major flying activities for this coming year.

1. Doug Gould is organising our Aerobatics camp the date will be advised.
2. Planning is well under way for our Convention and AGM being held in Temora from 22-25 May 2026
3. Our President's Fly-in.
4. Our Formation Camp is proving extremely popular and will be held around remembrance day in Yarrawonga. Angela and Tony have created a wonderful event, not only from an aviation educational perspective but have enthused the Yarrawonga township.

Apart from our four major flying activities we also have activities organised by members within the local area or State. Once your committee has been advised of these activities, we can place the information on our website. I am acutely aware that not all members have a Facebook account but are able to access our Web page. Please remember you do not need to live in a particular area to attend these activities, you could be lucky enough to be passing through at the time of the get together. Once your committee is advised of activities and are noted in minutes the event is covered by our Public Liability insurance.

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Association will be held on 24 May. The meeting will take place in person at Temora, with an option to attend online.

The AGM provides members with the opportunity to review the Association's progress, receive reports, and participate in important decisions that support our mission. All members are strongly encouraged to attend.



Further details regarding the venue, time, and online access will be provided separately.

Our Facebook membership is growing and we now have over 431 members. Not only do we have members of the Association but wider community members, who have had an involvement with Airtourers in their past and members who are looking to purchase an Airtourer and those that just love the Australian built aircraft.

During the month of February, we had 2 members enjoy milestones:

- Stan Tilley enjoyed his 95th birthday, flowers were sent to Stan on behalf of the Association:
- Mel Hupfeld joined the Edinburgh Military Tattoo showing off his talent as a bagpipe musician.

On a personal note I want to thank our members who have shown their support not only for me but what your Committee has achieved and is achieving.

Together, we've achieved so much, I'm proud of what we've accomplished and excited for what lies ahead in 2026.

Blue skies and tail winds

Deb

2026 Convention and AGM

Temora, NSW

23-25 May 2026

- Museum Tour
- Fighter simulator
- Guest Speaker AVM Mark Skidmore AM
- Dinner in the Museum Hangar
- Formation flying practice opportunity
- Nav Challenge

More details on page 36.



THE LATEST NEWS



Aeroplane 50th and 60th Birthdays

Airtourers

- VH-MTL (Stuart Pregnell) - 13 April 1966



- VH-MOF (Maurice Rolfe) - 13 April 1966



- VH-MOG (Kevin Rogan) - 29 April 1966



Airtrainers

- The first RAAF batch was completed at the end of 1975. The production line continued with the controversial “Swiss Aero Club” order; 14 completed aircraft were impounded and were stored in crates for the next five years! No more birthdays till July 1976, when the RNZAF batch started.



Tamworth - the story continues...

Although the President's Fly-in to Tamworth to celebrate 50 years of CT-4 in Australia is well and truly behind us, the memories are still with us. There are a few things that can still be followed up!

Baby Photos

At the Gala Dinner, "baby photos" of attending aircraft were displayed on the big screen in a slide show. They showed the aircraft when they were brand new (or at least near-new), some not even in their final coat of paint. Some of these very old photos were new even to the owners. The photos have now been made available on in the Association's online *Photo and Document Collection* at:



<http://airtourer.hyperwrite.net/default.aspx?aid=531>

Commemorative Poster

Fly-in participants received a souvenir pack containing some collectable keepsakes; the centrepiece was a signed limited edition poster by Grubby Fingers.



You can now purchase the individual renders of any of the 18 aircraft depicted (including the unique Foxtrot Mickey Mouse) through Grubby's online store at:

<https://www.ebay.com.au/str/grubbyfingersaviationprints>

The detail is stunning. Here's a zoom down to rivet level:



Membership Offer

The special membership offer for Tamworth registrants is still available. If you didn't pick up a form, or if you lost it(!), here's an online form that is easy to complete:

<https://forms.gle/XShpU2NUJXgqTVqv5>

No excuses now! *This offer is only open to non-member registrants (with Airtourer-family aircraft) for the President's Fly-in at Tamworth and the Formation Camp at Yarrawonga.*

Commemorative Plaque

For those who couldn't make it to Tamworth, or didn't get to the plaque unveiling ceremony, here's what the plaque looks like.



Buy, Swap and Sell

Don't let your unneeded Airtourer and CT-4 bits and pieces collect dust! Put them up for sale here! Or do you need a particular part or instrument? Ask here! Why not try to swap for something you no longer need? Or is it time to re-home your aircraft, or are you looking to buy? *Buy, Swap and Sell* is your Airtourer and CT-4 marketplace! It's free to advertise... just send your ad to editor@airtourer.asn.au.

Short Stay Accommodation at Yarrawonga

Airtourer Association members who have passed through Yarrawonga in the last couple of years will know that Angela (and Tony) have been busy building two-level accommodation into their hangar. Well, it's finished, and The Aeropartment is now available for short-term accommodation! Stay on the airfield, in a very comfortable and well-appointed apartment, with your Airtourer/Airtrainer visible in the hangar through the glass doors! Booking is done online, and if you are a current financial member of the Association, you can use one of the three codes AIRTOURER, AIRTRAINER or AIRCRUISER to get a 20% discount! More at <https://aeropartment.lodgify.com/>

For Sale: Propeller

Propeller - original 115 McCauley fixed pitch propeller with 300 hours of life before requiring refurbishment. Contact Ray Abernethy, rayabernethy@gmail.com, 0409 411 940.



Advertise here! Buy, Swap and Sell advertisements for Association members are free!



For Sale: Victa Airtourer VH-MRJ

Serial number 107. Made in Australia in 1965.

150 HP Lycoming Engine O-320 E1A installed 10/01/2020 @ 2405.5 AFTT (brand new engine, not an overhauled engine). Engine 178.1 TSN.

Constant speed propeller. Propeller 12.6 SMOH.

The numbers on the prop and engine are at the last M/R issue Dec 24.

Total time on airframe 2595.5 hours as of 19/08/2025.

Always hangared. Never used by flying school. Brand new paint done in September 2022.

History

150 HP Lycoming engine installed in 2004 when aircraft was registered VH-LVW.

Instruments and avionics

1 x 430 Garmin GPS, 1 x GTX 327 Garmin Transponder, 1 x PS Engineering audio panel, Fuel scan FS-450



Contact Sandra Cabot, 0416 170 946, doctorcabot@liverdoctor.com

For Sale: VH-RQH Airtourer 150 Fixed Pitch

The rebuild project is almost complete and will be sold with maintenance release. Reluctant sale due to health and hangarage challenges.

Contact Rod Swallow 0427 521 803



Victa Airtourer 115 VH-MVF

We are selling MVF! Aussie built 115, serial number 19. MVF was a demonstrator for Victa and was on static display at Sydney Royal Easter Show in 1963. Call or text Mark Barnett for details Ph: 0400 051 528



For Sale: Tyres and Seat

3 only 500x5 brand new old stock tyres suitable for Airtourers.

Seats are original in excellent condition - vinyl only requires dusting off and cleaning due to storage.

Contact Ray Abernethy,
rayabernethy@gmail.com, 0409 411 940.



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The Rolex GMT-Master That Flew Around the World – Cliff Tait’s Extraordinary Journey

The story of a pioneering Kiwi pilot and his Rolex GMT

by **Henry Black** (originally published in Fratello Watches magazine)



When pilot Cliff Tait took off in 1969 to fly solo around the world in a tiny aircraft, he carried with him a Rolex GMT-Master 1675 — a watch that became as vital as any flight instrument. This is the story of the man, the machine, and the timepiece that circled the globe together.

On May 12th, 1969, New Zealand aviator Cliff Tait taxied his diminutive AESL Airtourer 115, affectionately christened Miss Jacy, down the grass strip at Hamilton Airport. Ahead of him stretched an 80-day, 30,000-mile odyssey — a solo circumnavigation of the globe in one of the smallest single-engine aircraft ever to attempt such a journey.



Today, Miss Jacy sits suspended in the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland, preserved as a proud emblem of Kiwi ingenuity and courage. Accompanying the pilot was a trusty watch from Rolex.



It was a gesture of goodwill from the brand — and a tool that would soon prove essential in helping Tait keep his world in order. Strapped to Tait’s wrist throughout that flight was a Rolex GMT-Master 1675 engraved with, “Best wishes from Rolex Watch Co. to Cliff Tait 3-5-69.”

The making of a Kiwi pioneer

Clifford Vincent Tait wasn’t born into aviation privilege. Born in Wellington in 1929, he spent his youth moving between trades — radio technician, carpenter, tram motorman, electrician — before discovering flight in his 30s. A spinal defect had barred him from military service, but his determination found a different runway.





By the mid-1960s, Tait was working for R.C. Dimock Ltd and had earned his private pilot's licence. New Zealand's fledgling aircraft industry had begun producing the AESL Airtourer, a sprightly little low-wing monoplane designed for training and touring. Tait saw in it not only a capable aircraft but also an ambassador for New Zealand manufacturing. His idea was audacious: prove the Airtourer's reliability by flying it around the world — alone.



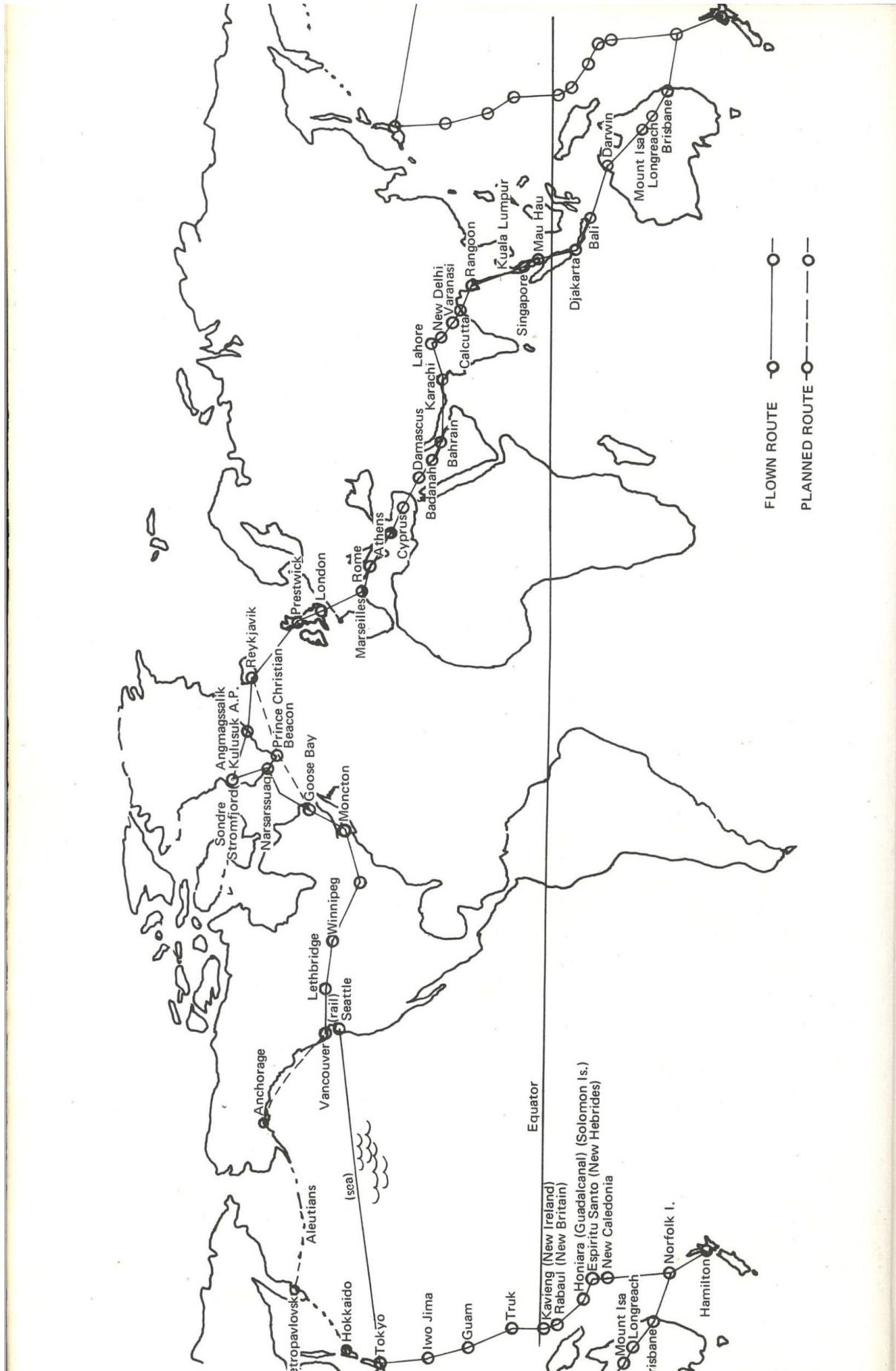
Cliff Tait flying a twin-engined Piper Aerostar 601 CF-BBA near Vancouver

A world adventure awaits

With modest sponsorships, a supportive family, and help from friends at his local aero club, Tait purchased an Airtourer 115, serial no. 521, and named her Miss Jacy. He planned a route that would take him from Hamilton across the Pacific, through Micronesia and Southeast Asia, over the Middle East, into Europe, then westward across the Atlantic and back home through North America and the Pacific once again.

The logistics were staggering. He'd need overflight permissions from more than 20 nations, fuel arranged at remote islands, and nerves of steel for 12-hour stretches over open water. When the Soviet Union denied him entry, he disassembled Miss Jacy in Tokyo and shipped her to Seattle, reassembling the aircraft himself to continue the journey.







After 284 flying hours and some 30,500 miles, Cliff Tait touched down again in Hamilton on August 1st, 1969. He had become the first pilot to circumnavigate the globe solo in a New Zealand-made aircraft — and, by most measures, in the smallest single-engine aircraft ever to do so.



Badanah, Saudi Arabia



The Rolex GMT-Master as co-pilot

In his memoir *Flight of the Kiwi*, Tait recalls his journey. During that flight, he made heavy use of the trusty GMT watch that Rolex had provided him for the journey. Brownsons Jewellers in Hamilton had arranged the presentation of this brand-new watch engraved with his name and departure date.



Above clouds en route to Kulusuk, Greenland

In his memoir, Tait recalled the presentation of this watch: *“Through the efforts of Mr. P. Ryan of Brownsons, jewellers in Hamilton, the Rolex Watch Company in Switzerland presented me with a Rolex GMT-Master. This particular watch had, in addition to the normal facilities, a 24-hour hand, which, although I did not realise it at first, was later to prove one of the three most valuable pieces of equipment I carried. The other two were a small rubber spout to adapt the huge filling nozzles of the petrol pumps I expected to encounter to the small intakes of my refuelling system and a small instrument I had made from a very early (1920s) ship’s radio direction-finder.*





This instrument I devised to eliminate possible error in making radio bearing calculations. I had worked on reducing the mental workload as far as possible, and this homemade computer plus the 24-hour hand on my new watch, which eliminated the necessity of converting local times, which vary throughout the world, to Greenwich Mean Time, the international time standard, proved most practical.”

The Rolex GMT-Master ref. 1675

That understated remark says everything about the man and the watch. The Rolex GMT-Master 1675 wasn't a fashion accessory; it was an instrument. Launched in the late 1950s and refined throughout the 1960s, the 1675 was the second generation of Rolex's pilot's watch. It was designed for professionals navigating the dawn of global jet travel — Pan Am pilots, long-haul aviators, and explorers who lived by time zones. Its rotating 24-hour bezel and independent GMT hand allowed simultaneous tracking of two time zones. Surely, this was a godsend for anyone crossing meridians faster than the human body could adjust.



A critical tool

For Tait, this was more than convenience. His flight path spanned the International Date Line, the equator, and multiple hemispheres. Local time could change by the hour. However, coordination with refueling crews and ground contacts required a constant reference to GMT. Tait's GMT-Master became a simple, reliable companion that didn't rely on power, batteries, or radio signals. The example he wore was a classic 1969 model. Its 40mm stainless steel case had a roughly 48mm lug-to-lug and a 13mm thickness, including the acrylic crystal. It housed a black dial with luminous hour plots and Mercedes hands and an automatic caliber 1575 with 26 jewels and a 48-hour power reserve. The watch was fitted to a riveted Oyster bracelet (ref. 7206/80) – lightweight, comfortable, and built for endurance.



As Tait traversed the globe, that Rolex endured everything – tropical humidity, engine vibration, sweat, and the chill of high-altitude flight. It never faltered. Decades later, its faded lume and scratches would serve as physical testimony to an extraordinary voyage.



Airtourer ZK-CXU Miss Jacy at Staverton Airport in Gloucestershire



Time and distance

Flying around the world solo is as much a battle with time as it is with distance. Daylight, fuel reserves, and weather windows governed every leg of the journey. The Rolex GMT-Master helped Tait track the rhythm of the planet — when to depart, when to contact airfields, and when to rest.



The watch's 24-hour GMT hand, sweeping slowly once around the dial per day, mirrored the Sun's movement across the Earth. In the cockpit of Miss Jacy, amid maps and gauges, Tait's Rolex provided a small but steady link to the wider world — a heartbeat of home ticking through the turbulence. Collectors often speak of “tool watches” with reverence, but here, the term is literal. This wasn't a watch worn merely to symbolize adventure. No, it was a crucial part of the adventure.



The Rolex GMT today

The Rolex GMT-Master 1675 that accompanied Cliff Tait has resurfaced. The engraved caseback confirmed its provenance, reading “Best wishes from Rolex Watch Co. to Cliff Tait 3-5-69.” The watch [was] sold at auction by Webb’s in New Zealand [in November 2025]. It is offered on its original riveted bracelet and with its period-correct black dial and acrylic crystal — a perfect snapshot of Rolex’s golden age of tool-watch design.



The listing noted the usual caveats — untested for water resistance, possibly serviced or with replaced parts over the decades, sold “as is.” But none of that really matters. The engraving and the life the watch witnessed give it importance beyond its condition. This is a timepiece that lived a full, high-altitude life — it earned its patina the hard way. In a world where provenance often feels manufactured, this one’s authenticity is unquestionable.





Disassembling Airtourer ZK-CXU Miss Jacy for shipment at Haneda Airport in Tokyo

Miss Jacy and the legacy of a journey

Today, *Miss Jacy* is on display at the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland. The little Airtourer sits quietly among larger machines, her fuselage still wearing the faint traces of sun damage from her voyage. The museum's collection notes capture the feat succinctly: the first solo circumnavigation of the world in a single-engine New Zealand-made aircraft — a triumph of Kiwi innovation.





Standing before that aircraft, one can imagine the Rolex ticking steadily on Tait's wrist as he scanned the horizon. The link between the watch and the plane is more than symbolic. Both are feats of precise engineering, built for reliability, simplicity, and endurance.





Why this Rolex GMT mattered

Within the watch-collecting community, the Rolex GMT-Master 1675 is already a beloved model — the archetype of the classic pilot's watch. This particular example, however, has lived a life that many would be jealous of!

This is a watch that has shown its adventures. It connects the best of two worlds — the mechanical beauty of Swiss watchmaking and the indomitable spirit of a self-taught New Zealand aviator who dared to circle the planet.



Flying through the Rocky Mountains, British Columbia



The final descent

Sadly, Cliff Tait passed away during the writing of this article. However, his story endures not only through his achievements and *Miss Jacy* but also through the Rolex GMT-Master that accompanied him on every leg of that flight. It remains a reminder that even in an age of satellites and smartwatches, the most meaningful instruments are those connected to human endeavors.



After the trip, Tait praised his family's patience and fortitude: “[*My thanks to*] my wife and family, who had the patience to endure the trials and tribulations associated with the flight,” he said.

Among those others listed in the acknowledgments were: “*Fifth Avenue Primary School, Hamilton, Noble Lowndes Holdings (UK) Ltd, United Kingdom, R.C. Dimock Ltd (Dimock Machines), Mr. E. Omundsen of Civil Aviation, New Zealand, Rolex Watch Company, Switzerland, Glos Air Ltd, United Kingdom, Waikato Sheet*



Metals Ltd, Hamilton, New Zealand, Amateur Radio Operators throughout the world, Union Steam Ship Co., Hamilton, New Zealand, Aviation Radio Ltd, Wellington, New Zealand, The Royal New Zealand Air Force, Whenuapai, Air Traffic Controllers throughout the world.”



Cliff Tait checking Airtourer ZK-CXU Miss Jacy before departure on his round-the-world flight, May 12th, 1969



The author would like to extend his thanks to the folks at the Auckland Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) for their work on archiving images. We'd also like to extend our condolences to Mr. Tait's family.

As mentioned, Cliff Tait's Rolex GMT-Master 1675 [was] auctioned by Webb's in New Zealand. The author would like to thank Webb's for providing images.



Tait's plane, which now sits in the Auckland Museum of Transport and Technology

This beautiful tribute to Cliff was written by [Henry Black](#) for Fratello Watches, and is reproduced with the kind permission of Robert-Jan Broer, Founder of Fratello Watches in The Netherlands. Read the [original article on the Fratello site](#).



FRATELLO

To find out what Cliff's Rolex sold for at auction, see page 38.



Members Only Offer!

Punkin Head Air Sports are offering Airtourer Association members a 5% discount on all canopy, propeller and pitot/intake covers for Airtourers and CT-4s. Dianne has the patterns for all models, and can provide covers in different materials and weights. Phone Dianne on 0429 938 426 or visit www.punkinheadair.com.au



Calendar of Events

13-15 March 2026	Airshows Downunder Shellharbour	https://saleairshow.com.au/
27-29 March 2026	Fly'n for Fun, Parkes	https://flynforfun.aero/
28-29 March 2026	Warbirds Over Scone	Interested in attending? Let the committee know! Ric and Veronica Davies are flying from WA for this! Robin Hilliard's going too! Join the gang!
8-11 April 2026	Australian Light Aircraft Championships (ALAC) at Latrobe Valley Aero Club	https://www.latrobevalleyaeroclub.com.au/australian-light-aircraft-championships-2026/
11 April 2026	Beverley Airshow, WA	www.beverleyairshow.com.au
18-19 April 2026	ANZAC Weekend Airshow, West Sale, Vic	saleairshow.com.au Interested in attending? Let the committee know!
16-17 May 2026	Wings Over Shellharbour	https://wingsovershellharbour.com.au/
22-25 May 2026	Airtourer Convention and AGM	Temora
26-28 June 2026	Brass Monkeys Formation Clinic	Toowoomba, QLD. Contact matthandley308@gmail.com
October 2026	President's Fly-in, Merimbula, NSW	Dates TBA
2027	AGM and Convention, Broken Hill, NSW	Dates TBA
2027	President's Fly-in, Clare Valley, SA	Dates TBA

Commemorative Newsletter

Registrants for the President's Fly-in to Tamworth in October received a special print edition of the Newsletter commemorating 50 years of CT-4 in Australia. The print copy was exclusive to registrants, but the **online version is now available!**



<https://airtourer.flowpaper.com/SpecialNewsletter50YearsofCT4/>



Puzzle Time

Tricky one, from **Doug Stott** (Life Member)

What model Airtourer/Aircruiser/Airtrainer is this wing from?

Solution on page 40.



Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX3ze1SxnJc>



Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon

The Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon Rule says that every actor in Hollywood can be connected to prolific actor Kevin Bacon through having worked together. It's easier to explain with an example: Michael Caton (*The Castle*) was in *Never Tell Me Never* with Joel Edgerton who was in *Black Mass* with Kevin Bacon. This gives a Bacon Number of 2.

There is a Web site that you can use to find the Bacon number.

<https://www.oracleofbacon.org/index.php>

In the January edition of the Newsletter, we asked for the Bacon Number of **Lockheed Lodestar**, with a generous hint that it had something to do with VH-XUS in Wanaka.

Wings over Wanaka is one of the best-known airshows in the southern hemisphere, so most readers would have heard of Wanaka on the South Island of New Zealand. Wanaka Airport is also the home of the National Transport and Toy Museum, which has a collection of aircraft including a Fokker Friendship, a GAF Canberra Bomber, a MiG-15 and a MiG-21, and a Lockheed Lodestar. The Lockheed was acquired from Australia, where it had been VH-XUS. And parked under the wing of XUS is one of the Museum's two Airtourers, ZK-CLF. (The other, COW, is not displayed.)



National Transport and Toy Museum. Photo: Wanaka Official



The Formation Flying Mindset

There's no I in Team

by **Angela Stevenson** (AESL Airtourer T6/24 VH-FVV)

I've spent a significant portion of my aviation life around formation flying; 3-4-ship aero club formations, 13-ship displays at huge airshows, assisting and recording the 46-ship formation over Point Cook in 2021 for the RAAF Centenary Air Armada (find it on YouTube), to my personal best as a formation pilot in a 6-ship sortie. Formation is now in my av-blood. After losing a great mate in a formation sortie in November last year, I've been thinking about mindset and how it creates trust, and consequently formation safety.

Two very different beasts

Formation flying is said to be the most exciting thing you can do with a pilot's license and the world's most-challenging team sport. It is also, necessarily, 'serious sh*t'. Formation flying demands a full psychological aviation overhaul, turning the solo pilot's 'freedom of flight' mindset into a study in discipline.

Stan Tilley's words

Firstly, let's visit our guru's wise words:

The Victa/CT4 series of aircraft are excellent for formation flying. [...]

To fly formation requires skill and concentration equal to aerobatics and other precise flying.

Keep in mind that formation flying is probably the most dangerous of all flying. Why? Because the safety of the formation depends not only on yourself but the other pilots as well.

To keep your formation flying safe, there are a few basic rules.

- 1. Do not fly formation with other aircraft without a pre-flight briefing.*
- 2. Do not fly formation if you do not have an endorsement.*
- 3. Do not fly formation if the other pilots are not endorsed.*
- 4. Do not fly formation if you do not have complete faith in your leader. (The formation leader is the most important member of the formation. He or she can give you a brilliant and exciting flight or fly you into disaster.)***
- 5. Keep the other aircraft in sight at all times.*
- 6. Concentrate, communicate, and anticipate.*



I'm certain Stan won't mind me extending point 4 to 'complete faith in your wingmates'. As he says himself, **'the safety of the formation depends not only on yourself but the other pilots as well'**. So let's get into why the right mindset is critical for every single member of a formation team.

Pre-Flight Mindset: Beyond 100%

Solo recreational flight is typically an individual mission; *you* have the ability to do what you want in flight, when *you* want or need. After all, there's no one else really watching, right?

Formation flight, however, is the absolute antithesis of individual freedom. It is the embodiment of discipline, conformity, and restraint. You cease to be a pilot in command (yes, even the lead pilot, just not in the same way as a wingmate) and become a cog or a single gear, in a multi-part machine. **So leave your 'solo pilot' hat at the airfield gate.**

If you arrive tired or out-of-sorts for a solo flight, pulling the pin is an easy choice. In a team environment the pressure to go is higher, but also the onus on you to opt out is much greater. For formation, your personal 'okay-ness' needs to be more like 110% because you aren't just flying for yourself; you are choosing to fly metres from others.

True airmanship is the willingness to say, '*Nah, I just can't today*'. Good wingmates won't jibe you; they'll trust you more for your honesty. If you aren't 100% - physically or mentally - gracefully step down, stay on the ground or take the right-hand seat as an observer. Placing your team's safety above your own desire to fly is the ultimate team-trust-building exercise.

The Ego Vacuum: No Room for Mavericks

In solo flight, you might get away with a bit of 'vocal fry' on the radio (look it up!), or a high-speed go-around to look 'cool' for the ground onlookers, but in formation: **Leave. Your. Ego. At. Home.** If you feel the need to be impressive, you have already failed the trust test.

No matter who you fly with, a set of Standard Operating Procedures must be agreed to and adhered to. Unfortunately, for some, taking their 'I do it a different way' hat off can be difficult, but a formation team flying with a mix of SOPs is not safe.

The ability to receive (and act on) feedback and criticism can be difficult for a Maverick, but they are a critical part of the debrief and can be very frank. Your flying will be scrutinised. Bring your thick hide and be not just ready but willing to receive and act upon that feedback without taking it personally. Because if you can't, team safety is compromised.



Thankfully, formation flying is self-limiting. Good pilots quickly work out who is flying for (and critically, with) the team and who is flying for their own glory. If you are a maverick, the pool of wingmates willing to risk their lives with you will eventually dry up, keeping the community healthy and safe.



The Sacred Briefing

The briefing is where a sortie is won or lost. Beyond standard flight planning of weather and fuel, a formation brief is an extensive, exhaustive, high-concentration event. It covers geographic boundaries, wingmate positions, lead changes, radio frequencies, and the 'what-ifs' - engine failures, losing sight, and the dreaded 'swapping paint'.

Briefings (both pre-flight and debrief) are non-negotiable and sacred.

Professionalism means turning up with your game face on. If you arrive late (not an option), talk over people, treat it as a social hour, or spend more time uploading your from-the-cockpit videos to social media instead of fully participating, you are leaving less space for yourself to learn and less space for others' important questions - thereby eroding safety margins; not just **your** safety margin, but those of your wingmates.



The Silent Contracts of Trust

Formation flying is contractual. While the Team Contract is to act safely as one machine, each pilot has an individual 'silent contract' with the wingmate they are following: **'I will not hit you'**. Number 2 has a contract with Number 1 - 'I will not hit you'. Number 3 has a contract with Number 2 - 'I will not hit you'. And so on. In this manner, everyone remains safe. Position changes complicate this but the essence is the same.

As a wingmate, your professionalism is measured by how well you maintain your station, requiring a level of trust almost unnatural to a solo pilot. 'Checking up' on the Lead by glancing at the GPS or altimeter is a breach of that trust, and that half-second lapse in concentration can be fatal. If you have faith in your leader you are able to obsessively trust they are managing the navigation and terrain so that you can obsessively manage your own contract, the gap between your wingtip and the one in front of you.

Micro-Picture Concentration

Solo pilots are trained to think 'big picture' - fuel, weather, forced landing fields. As a wingmate your world shrinks to a 'micro-picture'. Your situational awareness is tiny by necessity, focused on the few feet of air separating you from your wingmate and listening to your engine.

You are monitoring, assessing, and reacting in micro-second increments. You aren't replicating the Lead's movements; you are aiming for **synchronisation**. It's almost like mind-reading; identifying tiny changes in the visual picture - a slip of rudder or a change in flap - and instinctively responding with miniscule inputs. This 'SAS-type' style concentration for 40 minutes or more is exhausting. Our modern minds aren't built for it, which is why we must be professionally religious with our focus and remove other distractions such as distrust.

Role of Lead

With wingmates locked into the micro-picture, Lead is flying the 'cockpit' of a much larger, multi-part machine. Lead must fly with absolute predictability, making big, early decisions to keep the entire team clear of traffic and terrain. It's a lot more difficult to manoeuvre a 5-ship-wide formation of aircraft, than a single aircraft. And, there's more people involved. More points of failure. Every wingmate relies on the Lead's judgment. This is the very definition of trust: Lead provides safety, wingmates provide precision.



The case to *not* fly with those we don't trust

Other than in military settings, formation flying is a recreational choice; no one needs to die for it. It's a 'play' type of flight; which is the very reason some pilots struggle with the professionalism required. Their ego, their inner maverick, their 'look at me! I'm a pilot', takes over because they think they're 'just playing around doing formation'. And being endorsed definitely does not make you an expert, you've simply a licence to learn how to do it well.

The margin for error is as small as the distance you are away from someone and relies on so much more than skill. By choosing to fly with someone who demonstrates distrustful behaviours or attitudes - a performer, negotiator, or who simply lacks av-integrity - you are lowering your own airmanship score and putting the entire community at risk.

We must trust our wingmates and they must trust us. If we tolerate mavericks, we dilute the safety of the entire formation pilot pool.

The Ultimate Reward

The mission is over, engines shut down, the 'Formation Pilot Mindset' finally relaxes. You've reached the best and possibly most important part: the debrief. The shared exhilaration in a good team's mission success creates a camaraderie like no other.

With Lead driving the debrief, you pick apart the performance, share the 'av-love', and celebrate the individual and team successes, always coming away slightly wiser from the multiple lessons. And if you haven't found a lesson, you either have the wrong attitude or you're 'exceptional'—and we all know which is more likely.

Professionalism is a mindset. As far as I am concerned, formation flying professionalism in reality is not something you can switch on and off - you either have it, or you don't. The right formation mindset is demonstrated by actions and words, on the ground, *and* in the air. Look to fly with those that demonstrate the right mindset for formation flying in every aspect, bring your best self - always - and you'll have an av-experience like no other.



Get Ready for 2026 Convention and AGM - Temora

Friday May 22 – Monday May 25



- Museum Tour
- Fighter simulator
- Convention Dinner in the Museum Hangar
- Guest speaker: Air Vice Marshall Mark Skidmore AM
- Formation flying practice
- Navigation exercise to Cootamundra
- Guided museum tour
- Annual General Meeting
- Pilot Proficiency Programme

Arrive Friday or Saturday, depart Sunday or Monday.

See the [Airtourer Association Web site](#) for booking details and accommodation options at Skylodge, Koreela Park Motor Inn and GoldTerra Motor Inn.



As Time Goes By

by **Tony Self** (AESL Airtourer T6/24 VH-FVV)

A few years ago, Rob Cross sent through a photo of an Airtourer at Hoxton Park. It was taken in October 1980, and is a little, evocative snapshot of the world of aviation. Rob is standing on the port wing, talking to Norm Small standing at the tail. On the other wing is Norm's son, and at the wingtip is Rob's son. All immersed in the wonder and camaraderie of aviation.

The Victa 115, VH-MBG, was at the time owned by Norm. It was aircraft number 117. It was originally slated for export to New Zealand as ZK-CLD, but someone must have pulled some strings (or pullcords) and it was diverted instead to Murray Border Flying Club, and delivered to Tocumwal NSW in June 1965.

Murray Border Flying Club had only been formed in 1960, with formation members chipping in to buy a RAAF-surplus Auster. By 1962, the Club had a flight school, a second Auster, and branches in Deniliquin and Corowa. A Piper Colt was added to the fleet in that year, and then a Cessna 172.

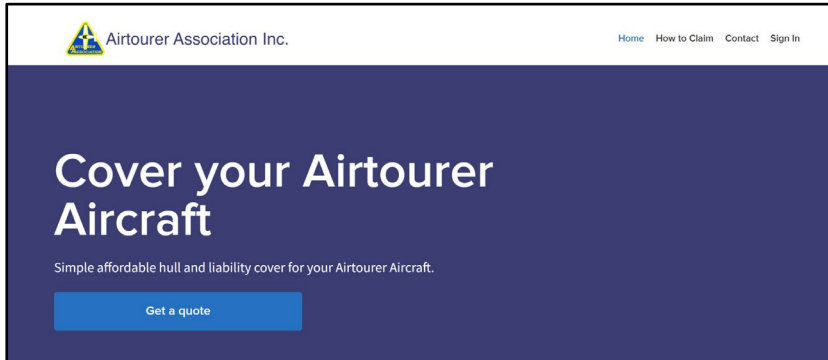


In August 1963, the Club's first order for a Victa was placed. That aircraft was a 115, VH-MBD, and it was replaced by MBG. Although it's still on the register, MBG doesn't seem to have flown since an accident in West Sale in 1997.



Aircraft Insurance for Members

Agile Insurance have put together a special package for Airtourer, Aircruiser and CT-4 Airtrainer owners. This arrangement is for current Airtourer Association members only. There is a good chance you can reduce your insurance costs with this offer, and there's absolutely no obligation. To get a quote, use your member details to log in to <https://airtourer.asn.au/> and then click the Agile link on the home page.



The screenshot shows the Airtourer Association Inc. website. At the top left is the logo and name. At the top right are links for Home, How to Claim, Contact, and Sign In. The main content area has a dark blue background with the text "Cover your Airtourer Aircraft" in large white font. Below this is the subtext "Simple affordable hull and liability cover for your Airtourer Aircraft." and a blue button labeled "Get a quote".

Cliff's Rolex

LOT 26 IN SALE 100JD IMPORTANT JEWELS, WATCHES & LUXURY ACCESSORIES ONLINE AUCTION - NOVEMBER 2025

Cliff Tait's Rolex GMT-Master 1675 Wristwatch - "A Watch Worn Around the World," circa 1969



Estimate	\$20,000 - \$25,000
Price Realised incl. BP	\$97,990
Status	Sold



Stan Tilley Turns 95

by **Doug Gould** (Victa Airtourer 160 VH-CTM)

On Wednesday February 4th, I travelled to Hobart for Stan Tilley's Birthday party, which was on the actual day. The party was at his daughter Fran's house at Battery Point. It was a glorious day in Hobart and we had a really nice time outside in the shade of a pergola. The party was quite small, with mainly family there, although a few flying people from the Aero Club of Southern Tasmania (ACST) were also there, where it is clear that Stan is revered. Stuart Pregnell who now owns Stan's Airtourer VH-MTL was also there.

Stan and I had a nice time reminiscing. Stan gave me my first Airtourer flight in about 1983/84 at an Airtourer fly-in at Lakes Entrance. I was going to buy an Airtourer, but got diverted by competing in aerobatics in Pitts Specials. I think this was in Stan's first Airtourer – the 115 Hp VH-BQK before buying the 150 Hp VH-MTC. I reconnected with Stan in the Australian Aerobatic Club and repaid my Airtourer flight with Stan's first flight in a Pitts Special.





Puzzle Solution:



This was, as hinted, a trick question. The wing wasn't from the Airtourer family at all. Well, perhaps a distant cousin. The wing was from a GAF Jindivik transonic pilotless target aircraft. 517 Jindiviks were produced at Port Melbourne from 1952 to 1997. (Yes, you read that right.) The Armstrong-Siddeley Viper engine was developed specifically for the Jindivik as a short-life jet, but ended up being extremely reliable and used in the Macchi trainer (amongst others). Jindiviks were exported to the UK, Sweden and the USA, and used by the RAN at Jervis Bay. The RAF operated them (in Wales) until 2004.

The reason for some construction similarities between the Jindivik and Airtourer family aircraft lies with the fact that most of the Airtourer design team

worked at GAF, including Henry Millicer.

The Jindivik was slightly better performing... 490 kts, 65,000 ft, 4000 ft/min.



Around the Grounds

What's happening on social media?

It has been a bit quiet on the social media front over the last couple of months... Christmas holidays were probably a factor!

Ric and Veronica from Western Australia are planning a bit trip across the continent in March, and returning in May. They were looking for a hangarage for their Airtourer within a couple of hours of Scone, but we hear Chad has helped them out.

Doug Gould visited VH-BWI, the Airtourer 100 on display in the Moorabbin Air Museum, which delighted Brielle Russell, who has a few lines in her log book with BWI in one of the columns! Trevor Moir shared the news that the Victa company is back in Australian hands; Queensland-based RGS (Roy Gripske & Sons) bought the company from Briggs and Stratton.

The legendary Stan Tilley turned 95 in February! Happy Birthday Stan! (See story page 39.) The cake featured an Airtourer, of course.

Those attending the Gala Dinner at the Tamworth 50 Years of CT-4 celebrations will have fresh memories of Mel Hupfeld's bagpipery, where he played the Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah song, along with a New Zealand lament. Mel performed at the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo in Brisbane in a pipe band in front of tens of thousands.



Gerry Pels posted about a Warrnambool weekend fly-away in February with 13 people and four Airtourer family aircraft.



And Doug Stott updated us on the refurbishment of T6/24 VH-OVV, which had temporarily been a submarine during the Lismore floods a few years ago now. The work is being done in Albury managed by owner Tim Glabatz and Airtourer guru Andrew Ronald.



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From the Archive



Cockpit of AESL CT-4 Airtrainer 002, showing unusual instrument layout, single controls, and original canopy. Delivered to Thai Police Aviation Division in 1973. Photo: Max Jang

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