



# NZ Autogyro Association turns 50

*This year, the NZ Autogyro Association is celebrating 50 years of existence. Club President Lloyd Heslop and Michael Norton put these notes together about the Association's past and present.*

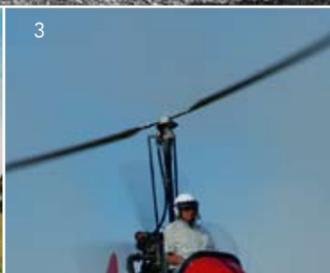
**THE INAUGURAL** meeting (of the then NZ Rotorcraft Association) took place on 4th June 1960 with 9 people present at the residence of Mr and Mrs O'Brien in Palmerston North. Present at that meeting was Alf Crowe, our only life member, who sadly passed away last year.

The aims and objectives of this new body were to strive to achieve progress in rotary wing flight in New Zealand and its dependencies. Mr Les Hubbard was thanked for the loan of a typewriter. Alf Crowe was appointed Treasurer and Association fees were set at 30 pence. A quorum was to be 4 persons. The meeting concluded at 10.10pm followed by supper and slides by Alf Crowe of gyro gliders.

That was 50 years ago. Currently in 2010 there are 76 financial members and the Association is in good heart. Although the number of home-built autogyros on our register remains small compared to other aircraft, the (fairly recent) availability of good quality off-the-shelf factory manufactured machines has seen an increase in interest in our sport. True cross country ability has attracted a number of fixed wing pilots to our Association and they now greatly enjoy our style of flight.

There are many long time gyronauts amongst our membership. Several have participated on the Committee over the years and are still in possession of some well loved older (and new) home-built machines.

Most of our members are



**Gyros through the ages:** 1. A Bee Aircraft Gyro (believed to be at Ardmore in the early '70s), 2. An early '80s Bensen B-8 gyro (this one with Rotax power), 3. Air Command, 4. Italian built Magni Gyro, 5. Tandem Dominator, 6. Autogyro Europe Eagles, 7. Autogyro Europe Calidus (on the NZ Air Safari).

true enthusiasts and know virtually every nut and bolt of their machines. And they will often experiment with ideas to improve stability, performance and slow speed flight, discussing the merits of rotors, propellers, engines, and other components to the benefit of all members.

Over the last 50 years the Association has helped in establishing rules that enable us to enjoy our sport. In the early times we offered the then Air Transport Division of the Ministry sound guide lines that in the most part still exist today.

It is actually only recently (the last 15 or so of those 50 years) that two seat machines have been available for training. Prior to then, gyro pilots learned by what became known as the Bensen approach (after Igor Bensen who popularised gyrocopters in the 1950's and 60's). In many cases this involved teaching oneself to fly by following a lengthy and carefully prescribed process, usually starting with unpowered, towed flight behind a car. Bensen's manuals are still applicable today and in fact form the basis of the instructional programmes that a lot of gyro instructors still follow. These days of course, there are two seat machines readily available for instruction, so learning to fly takes less time and is less prone to risk.

There is a great depth of knowledge amongst those in the Association and as with other disciplines of recreational aviation, there is a great deal of willingness to share that knowledge and to share the joy we get from our particular form of aviating.

The highlight of the aviation year for autogyro enthusiasts in New Zealand is our annual fly-in and AGM,

this year at Dannevirke from 28th through 31st January 2011. This event continues to grow each year. It's not that long ago that all the attending aircraft would arrive on trailers (a drive-in?) to be 'patch flown' for the weekend, in-between the usual socialising and activities of an enthusiast's gathering. These days there are sure to be a decent number of aircraft 'fly-in' from several places around the country. Last year for example, a whole formation arrived from Tauranga.

For a small group of people, the Association is in good health. We have several instructors among our ranks and quality tuition is available in two seat aircraft. The support is there for those who want to build themselves either from a kit or from plans, and the dealerships and servicing are in place for those who simply want a turn-key aircraft to purchase and fly away in.

The sport of autogyros is currently enjoying a worldwide renaissance, helped to a large degree by these turn-key machines and professional pilot training. For example, Autogyro Europe who produce ready-to-fly, partially and fully enclosed tandem gyros are building aircraft at the rate of at least three per week.

If you would like to find out more about gyros in New Zealand, contact the NZ Autogyro Association via our website, [www.autogyro.org.nz](http://www.autogyro.org.nz) or visit our fly-in at Dannevirke from 28th to 31st January 2011. You'll be able to view a wide variety of aircraft, go for a ride or introductory flight, and speak directly to the enthusiasts within the Association who are only too keen to share their love of the sport with you. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Nelson Gyro Training

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Contact Lloyd Heslop on 027 442 4500 or email: [jaberhart@heslops.co.nz](mailto:jaberhart@heslops.co.nz)

Join the NZ Autogyro Association for just \$35 per annum: [www.autogyro.org.nz](http://www.autogyro.org.nz)

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