



On Show - The Preparation

Contributed by Frank Parker

AT THE TIME of writing, it's a couple of weeks before Easter. This is invariably a high activity time about the NZ Warbirds hangar as various groups sort out the final details for the upcoming Airshow. In varying degrees NZ Warbirds has been involved in these Easter events since 1988, including the first Wanaka 'Show' and the inaugural Classic Fighters Marlborough Show in 2001. These two well established events now share Easter in alternating years. It does save the question, "What will we do for Easter this year?"!

Planning for these events actually starts at least six months earlier when we begin talking with the Organisers over what they may be requiring. This will be dependent on the Organisers 'theme' for their show, what's available throughout NZ (and overseas) and financial resources. The latter is a fact of reality and Organisers can face financial success or failure on the strength of the weather forecast. .

It's hard to believe that the T-28 Trojan, which not too many years ago was one of the few aircraft in the Heavy Metal brigade on the NZ Show circuit, is now an unwanted 'Bridesmaid' to a plethora of WW II Fighters. Who could have imagined a possible line up of four L-39 Albatros jets, a Strikemaster and a pair of Mustangs, Spitfires, Kittyhawks, Yak-3, then add in a Corsair plus other exotica... (That's right folks - a possibility of 10 WWII aircraft). And that's only the 'heavies' - there's also a world class collection of WW I aircraft available and we still haven't considered the General Aviation scene with top line aerobatic displays, the 'Classics', the home-builts, and so the list continues.

Who would have thought that Organisers could have difficulty fitting in three formation aerobatic displays, let alone

all the other offerings? I don't suggest that all the above will be at any one airshow, however it does illustrate the depth of our historic aviation scene in New Zealand.

Back to the topic. There is a lot of organising behind the scenes. Starting with aircraft, the owners need to ensure that maintenance is up to scratch and sufficient flight time available to cover the show. This invariably requires some last minute 'fixes', just what the Engineering Shops want!



P-51 Mustang in airshow mode at Whenuapai. Chris Gee photo.

It's up to the pilots to ensure their aircraft receive final preparations including oil checks, arranging oil at destination (some of these aircraft 'drink' 3 litres per hour), greasing the props, tyre pressures (40psi mains, 60 psi tail - or you will get shimmy), oleos, etc, etc. In fact for our Harvard Fleet we have a 'working bee' the week prior in order to attend to all the 'last minutes', as well as a pre-airshow 'valet'.

Additionally there is accommodation to arrange. We will have been planning this for over 12 months (sometimes two years since the last show!). At this stage it's down to final numbers and for how long. Pilots (and supporters) don't want to be caught without 'digs' and moteliere don't want to be stuck with empty rooms.

There are also the 'support' aircraft to plan. NZ Warbirds members generally have the convenience of travel options in the Warbirds Dakota who are often able to arrange an 'Airshow Package'. Additionally the Catalina often has seats available and if you want to take the scenic option, a seat in the DHC Beaver might be available, where you can watch the scenery glide by at a sedate 90knots!

And it wouldn't be a 'Show' without administration. Pilots need to ensure their licences and display ratings are current (often involving a call to yours truly - how can I help!!), and ensure that aircraft are appropriately insured. These details are prerequisites to performing at any aviation event.

And we haven't left home yet. This Easter there will be a flotilla of 14 + Warbirds aircraft heading to Omaka from Ardmore to attend and display at Classic Fighters. Some of the Harvard group are planning an early departure to participate in a 'formation clinic' for several days prior to the show.

On the day there will be a flight planning exercise, for example the Harvard has the 'legs' for an Ardmore-Omaka flight but reserves are approaching minimum on arrival, so how's the headwind?, what's the chance of an en-route weather diversion?, how will ATC treat us today?, should we just plan a stop at Wanganui? (good coffee). Of course there will also be groups heading south from North Shore, Tauranga and New Plymouth. Suddenly those fuel pumps at Wanganui can become somewhat crowded!

So come Easter weekend there will be plenty of hangarage available at Ardmore, as we will all be at Omaka. Now who's arranging the weather?

Cheers, frankly@xtra.co.nz

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