

# Classic Fighters at Omaka

**THE** Classic Fighters Airshow at Omaka airfield in Blenheim is sheer good fun. 18,000 plus people agree. The biennial show has been held at Easter every second year since 2001 and the numbers attending keep growing. What began as a two day show has stretched to nearly three days, with Friday's 'practice' day a more relaxed, but equally spectacular flying day, capped off by a 'Twilight Display' and concert.

This airshow's point of difference is the large number and range of WWI aircraft bumbling through the skies. With types like the Avro 504 that first flew in 1913 we had one hundred years of military aviation on display. The sight of up to a dozen of WWI Allied and German aircraft 'dogfighting' over the field rather reminds me of a bunch of puppies playing in the sunshine. There is something delightful about the fzzt putt of their engines and the smell of castor oil as the colourful biplanes and triplanes 'battle' against an autumn blue sky. With seven flying Fokker aircraft along with numerous

British built biplanes in the display it must be one of the greatest collection of these old crowd pleasers in the world. Even with the pilots dressed in appropriate uniforms it takes a bit of thought to remember that these were war machines and that with real guns these sorts of fights were deadly. Most modern pilots would struggle to safely fly them. The WWI displays took place in the morning before the wind came up as these machines don't cope with anything much above 15 knots. Just put yourself in the cockpit for a moment. Imagine yourself as an 18 year old with mere hours of flight time and you're about to fly over enemy lines and try to shoot down another aircraft not very different from your own. To do so you're going to have to get close enough to see the other pilot's face. Both of you are sitting exposed and out in the open air in a craft made of wood, fabric and glue.

The Classic Fighters Airshow is all about saluting the men who went to war in aircraft.



Follow that aircraft. The photographers had a great few days out.



Dogfights between WWI aircraft are a feature of Classic Fighters. A Sopwith F.1 Camel and Fokker D. VII battle it out.



(left) Fokker D. VII (right) Fokker DR. 1s. Many German aircraft were brightly coloured and personalised.



(left) Sopwith Pup. (above top) Fokker DR. 1 Triplane. Notice the stopped prop, on glide approach after an engine seizure! (centre) British versus German aircraft battle for supremacy. (lower) The Bristol Fighter F.2b.

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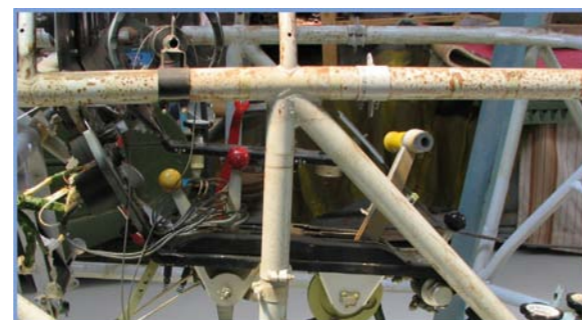
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The WWII fighter aircraft are more familiar to most of us. We've been seeing the Roaring Forties Harvards, various Spitfires, the Corsair, Kittyhawk and others at airshows around the country for some time. They are impressive though. The fabulous roar of radial engines quickens the pulse of all aircraft enthusiasts. The sound of mass Harvards is exhilarating, reverberating through your whole body. Imagine what a squadron of them sounded like. The Soviet Yakovlev Yak-52s group display was a highlight of the show this year. First flying in 1976, many of these Soviet primary trainer aircraft are relatively recently manufactured. The commentary for their display was effortlessly given by a Yak-52 pilot and owner of one of the planes who is no stranger to public speaking, TV weatherman Jim Hickey.

We were treated to displays by a wide range of WWII warbirds, again with some German aircraft, the Messerschmitt Bf 108 and Focke Wulf FW-190 (a Flugwerk reproduction) playing the baddies in the dogfights. These massed aircraft dog fights, both WWI and WWII were enhanced by re-enactors battling it out on the ground beneath the aerial battle, with guns and bombs and fireballs adding to the spectacle.

The presence of re-enactors camping out on the airfield added to the atmosphere and fun of the event, with bands and singers helping the punters get in the mood. Ground displays of Classic Cars, trade tents and bouncy castles and rides meant there was plenty to look at when anyone got tired of looking upwards.

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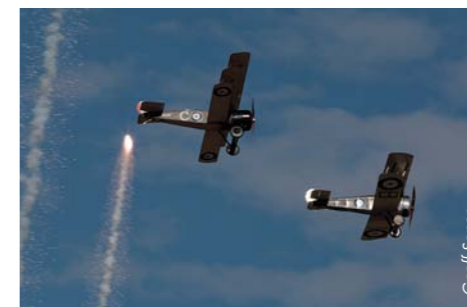


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The German Focke Wulf FW-190 flown by Frank Parker played the 'baddie' in the mock air battles. Manufactured by Flugwerk, this is a faithful reproduction of the original aircraft. This example was put into service by JEM Aviation here in New Zealand and is domiciled with them at Omaka. Jay McIntyre and his team at JEM Aviation were also responsible for an outstanding rebuild of the Yak-3 which flew in the airshow and is pictured above (see also KiwiFlyer Issue 24 available for free download from our website).



Rudi Hofer



Geoff Soper



Robert McCaw



Robert McCaw



Robert McCaw



Robert McCaw



Robert McCaw



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Everyone got into the fun of the authentic mock battles with ground troops in uniform and great props. It was nearly a shame to see the Natter blown up - in spectacular fashion.



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1. Graeme Frew in his immaculate Yak-3 that was restored by JEM Aviation at Omaka.  
 2-3. The Harvards of the Roaring Forties Display Team are one of the staples of NZ airshows and along with the Yak-52s provided some great (and very noisy) formation aerobatic routines.  
 4-7. The Red Star Yak-52 Display team. Their members usually practise individually or in groups of two or three when they can get together, yet present a tight and spectacular massed display when flying in formations of up to eight aircraft at our major airshows.

John McCaw



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Brendon Deere's Supermarine Spitfire is always a crowd favourite.

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Easily recognised by its wing shape (designed in part to keep the landing gear short and robust for carrier landings), New Zealand's only Goodyear FG-1D Corsair was flown by Keith Skilling.

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Curtis P-40 Kittyhawk flown by Liz Needham. This example has just celebrated its 70th birthday. See this issue of KiwiFlyer, page 10.

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Aside from airshow routines, Doug Brooker's Spitfire was kept very busy by paying passengers, happily ticking a Spitfire ride off their bucket list.

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The Messerschmitt Bf 108 has flown many hours in NZ with its owner, Colin Montgomery using it regularly as his personal transport aircraft.

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Garvin Conroy



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## Classic Fighters Omaka Airshow

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The Air Force also attended with the Kiwi Blue Parachute team, the Red Checkers and the Iroquois, NH90 and Sea Sprite (technically Navy) helicopters. Their Boeing 757-200, while unable to land, put on a good display. Sandwiched in the programme between the Air Force and the Yaks, a silent glider showed that precision flying does not have to be noisy. There was a huge range of aircraft, including some civilian aerobatic displays and, at the opposite end of the noise spectrum to the glider, the Strikemaster and Venom jets - truly an airshow with something for everyone.

One of the stars of the show was the newly restored Avro Anson. Lovingly restored by husband and wife Bill and Robyn Reid and a large enthusiastic crew of helpers, the cabin is complete with period maps and working wireless radios that only transmit and receive in morse code. There were two gentlemen at the show who had actually flown in this particular aircraft and were delighted to see it back in the air.

On the Saturday night, TV One news suggested that the high numbers attending Classic Fighters was due to the popularity of flight simulator games and people wanting to see the real thing in action. A



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8. Fast and really loud. The privately owned Strikemaster and Venom jets.  
9. Strikemaster joyrides thrilled a lucky few.



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7

The RNZAF was in full attendance at Omaka.

1. Evening light provided some great photo opportunities. It won't be long before our Air Force Iroquois' are retired, we hope from service only and not airshows as well.

2&3. The Navy's Kaman SH-2G Seasprite helicopter demonstrated a winching task from the back of a moving truck. 4. The (big) new NH90 was demonstrated to an appreciative crowd and we look forward to seeing these machines really put through their paces as experience on type accumulates. 5. Flying empty, the 757 was impressively fast and manoeuvrable.

6. As always, the Red Checkers gave a polished display. 7. It was a delight on seeing them land to discover that one of the Kiwi Blue Parachute team was a woman.

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**Captions 1&4.** Silent glider aerobatics proved that not all aircraft need an engine. Doug Hamilton displays the ASH 25 glider after releasing from his tow plane at 3000 feet. **2.** Bush modified Piper Cubs showed their suitability for landing in small strips. **3.** de Havilland DH.84 Dragon, another old beauty. **5.** Nothing says "Antique flight" like a Tiger Moth. **6.** Mustangs. **7.** The DC3 was kept busy with passenger flights in between displays. **8.** Another fine old de Havilland aircraft - the Beaver, many of which are still in service today.

random selection of punters queried about this the next day thought this was the silliest thing they'd heard. They were there, they said, because: they liked aeroplanes, they liked classic aeroplanes, it seemed like a good thing to do on a holiday weekend, air shows were fun or, they liked taking photos of aeroplanes. None of the ten people I questioned mentioned video games.

Why are these events gaining in popularity? You could poll the entire crowd and not get a definitive answer but it seems that classic aircraft, and in fact any aircraft, displayed creatively (skilled piloting, speed and noise) are just good clean fun and a great weekend out.

Our thanks to the team at Classic Fighters for putting on a great show.  
Jill McCaw




John McCaw

(above) The Messerschmitt Bf 108 closes in on the Avro Anson (also pictured below) during a re-enactment of a famous event over Dunkirk when three Ansons were attacked by nine Me 109s. Surprisingly one of the Ansons managed to shoot down two of the enemy and damage another causing them all to retreat.




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