



contributed by Jill McCaw

Very affordable fun: Vintage Gliding

AS I WROTE about in the last issue, soaring is not always about faster/higher/further. Local flying can be just as enjoyable, and often more so than the “big” flights, some of which require large degrees of planning and preparation. Gliders too, don’t have to be the expensive, shiny white, modern fibreglass machines. There are heaps of serviceable older gliders around and some are still being used by clubs around the country. Learning to fly in a wood and fabric glider is just as effective as training in a fibreglass two seater. As well as the older gliders flying in clubs there is a thriving vintage gliding movement, both in New Zealand and world-wide.

Fibreglass gliders have in fact been around since the 1960s and the most popular early models are still flying. The recently world record breaking ASH 25 glider, variants of which have been seen by thousands displaying at Classic Fighters and Warbirds Over Wanaka, is in fact around 25 years old. The first one of this type of glider was seen in New Zealand in the early 1990s. It is still considered a “hot” ship and these gliders are still the glider of choice for pilots wanting to set speed and distance records. But they’re also really expensive for the average pilot. There are three of these gliders currently for sale in NZ, asking price, around \$200,000. A single seat Libelle, the original fibreglass single seater can be picked up for a lot less. There is one for sale for \$20,000. Libelles are still winning Club Class competitions around the world.

Wood and fabric gliders however can be picked up for a song, and depending on your expectations, you can have just as much fun flying these. The Ka6, a real “hot ship” of its time has similar performance to the Libelle. Performance drops off as you go older but you have to remember that back in the ‘50s and ‘60s pilots such as New Zealand soaring pioneer Dick Georgeson and his wife Helen were setting high altitude and distance records, some of which still stand, in exactly these gliders. It is possible, just not very comfortable, and much more difficult than flying modern gliders to do this again, should you really want to challenge yourself. You can pick up a wood and fabric glider, in flying condition for less than \$10,000. That’s cheap flying.

Mostly these gliders are great for just enjoying being in the sky. The Ka8 that I spent many hours flying in the ‘80s, thermalled in the barest puff and could stay airborne as long as the pilot’s



A recent vintage rally at Taupo.



A Ka6 restored by John Currie of Rotorua.



A Ka8, much loved by the author.



The Ka6 contest scene in NZ in the 1960s.

posterior would allow. It had the penetration of a falling leaf however so cross country flights became a real adventure and you made sure there were landing areas close. I loved flying that glider.

The Vintage Kiwi group have regular rallies around the country where enthusiastic pilots, owners and restorers come together to enjoy these lovely old aircraft. They find that as people clear out old sheds and hangars they are “gifted” with more antique gliders than they have the funds or personnel to restore. Vintage Kiwi have a partnership with the Classic Flyers museum in Tauranga and have several gliders on display there. There is a beautifully restored Slingsby Prefect glider hanging in the ceiling of the Queenstown Airport. The Prefect’s registration is ZK GAB – so the 2nd glider registered in the country.

While it is lovely to see these museum pieces looking shiny, Vintage Kiwi is much more interesting in restoring these antiques to flying condition and then actually flying them. That is what their rallies are all about. If what you’ve just read sounds interesting, and especially if you have wood and dope aircraft restoration skills, Vintage Kiwi would love to hear from you. Contact Roger Brown at sailplane@xtra.co.nz.

I’m Jill McCaw and I’m the editor and publisher of SoaringNZ, New Zealand’s premier gliding magazine. To learn more about gliding and to find clubs in your area see Gliding New Zealand’s website. For subscriptions to SoaringNZ visit www.mccawmedia.co.nz

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