

Free Training at the Dargaville Aero Club

There are all sorts of interesting stories behind the network of aero clubs we are fortunate to have throughout New Zealand. From social gatherings of enthusiasts to ab-initio and advanced training, aero clubs are the glue that binds a diverse aviation community together. KiwiFlyer welcomes contributions from readers about clubs and activities. Murray Foster and Allan Jessop provided this profile of their fast growing club at Dargaville.

THE NORTHERN Wairoa Aero Club, more commonly known as the Dargaville Aero Club, is situated alongside the Northern Wairoa River, literally a stones throw from the town. Whangarei, Kaipara Flats, Kaikohe, Kerikeri and Kaitiāia airfields are all close at hand, creating excellent cross country training opportunities in uncontrolled airspace.

Based on what was once a low lying swampy piece of land, club members have steadily developed a 1000m long runway of crushed limestone, with an adjacent grass runway of the same length that is used during the dry summer period.

Approximately ten years ago, the club executive made a decision to change focus from general aviation to recreational flying. This resulted in the acquisition of club aircraft in the recreational category which members could hire for an affordable cost. Since making this decision, the club hasn't looked back and is considered to be one of the fastest growing aero clubs in the country. Membership is about 100, most of whom are from the local farming community.

Club members are currently building a new clubhouse extension with funding assistance from the ASB Trust. When finished, it will be a facility of which club members and the community at large can be proud.

Aircraft on line

After considerable research by several members, the club chose the Italian Fly Synthesis Storch as its primary training aircraft. These are well proven, with more than 400 Storch trainers in use throughout

Europe. Another attractive feature is that they are constructed of composite materials which are immune to the corrosive salt laden atmosphere of NZ's western coastline. Currently there are 28 students (hailing from Kaitiāia to Timaru) flying the club's Storch trainer and they are



Dargaville Aero Club is located just across the river from the town.



Studying for exams in the Dargaville Aero Club. Two students aged 15 and one aged 80.



Dargaville Aero Club students pose with the club's Storch trainer

all avid fans of this lovely little machine.

The club also has a Fly Synthesis Texan, a state-of-the-art carbon fibre machine that is a dream to fly and very popular with club members for comfortable cross country trips and training.

For GA Pilot training, the club uses its own SPIFR Cessna 172 180hp "Superhawk" aircraft.

Free Flight Training and Accommodation

One of the unique features of the club is that all flying and theory tuition is given free of charge. All the student pays for is the cost of operating the aircraft. The club is able to do this due to its own farming operations (sheep, cattle and kumara), the profits of which are plowed back into airport maintenance and student tuition.

Accommodation is free too. Students can live on the club premises during their training period and although basic, all that is required are sleeping bags and your own food. The club premises are currently being expanded to include a bunk room, new toilets and showers and also a well equipped kitchen.

Well known Dargaville resident Murray Foster is the Chief Flying Instructor (and Authorised Testing Officer). Murray was a self employed Whangarei automotive garage proprietor but has recently sold the business and can now devote all his time to club students, offering flight training on a seven day basis rather than just at weekends. Murray has in fact been volunteering his time to teach students for over 30 years.

The club's other recreational instructor is Brian Taylor, a Northland Beef Farmer. Brian is also an authorised S.A.C. Test Pilot and Inspection Authority, specialised in checking out all types of recreational and homebuilt aircraft.

Jill Mortensen is the club's GA instructor. Jill is a very experienced B cat who has been training pilots for over 30 years.

Saturday Lunches

The Club is famous amongst the aviation fraternity for its Saturday lunches, started 30 years ago

and still held every Saturday at 12:30pm. These are open to anyone keen on flying and meeting a great bunch of like minded people who come from far and wide.

For more information

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