The ‘Aviation Tales’ Newsletter: January 2026.

And a Happy New Year to all my readers.

Let’s all do our bit for a more positive 2026!

Recent Aviation News.

Air New Zealand has commenced testing of a battery/electric BETA Alia CX300 aircraft, ahead of commercial evaluation of cargo flights with a second aircraft in 2027.

Together with a technical team from the manufacturer, US-based BETA Technologies, Air New Zealand will perform flights throughout the country, assessing the aircraft's performance in various manoeuvres and conditions.

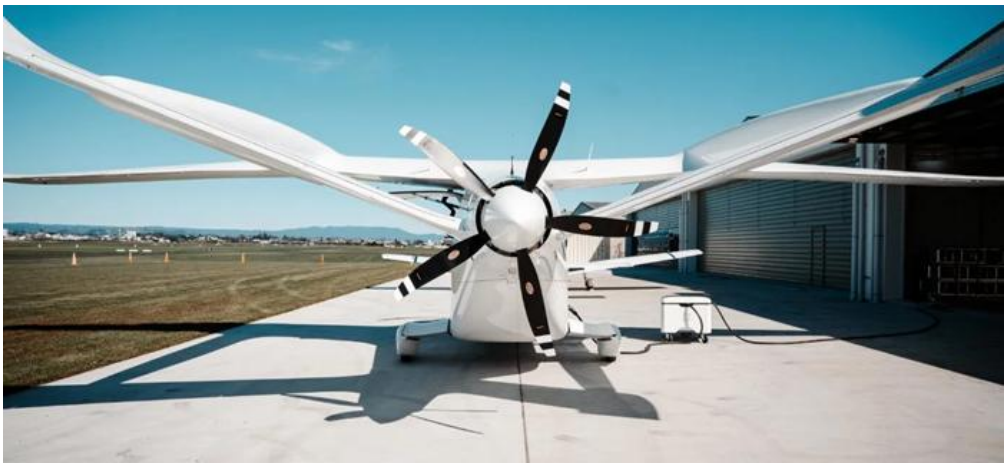
They will also use the aircraft to evaluate ground infrastructure including electric charging equipment and handling services, as it explores options to help decarbonise its operations.

The BETA prototype aircraft, leased by Air New Zealand for four months, is the first in the airline's Next Generation Aircraft technical demonstrator programme.

It is undertaking what the airline calls "an intensive proving programme" at Hamilton airport, before it flies south to our capital city.

The plan is then to fly across the Cook Strait to Blenheim during late January.

The test aircraft will be supported with 65Kw electric chargers at each of these airports, enabling charging in 90 minutes and daily operations across multiple routes.



Air New Zealand has one firm order for a CX300 through aircraft lessor Avolon, with options to acquire two more and purchase rights for another 20 examples.

The plan is to use its first electric plane to carry freight for NZ Post, initially between Wellington and Blenheim, though the introduction has been deferred from next year to 2027.

Restoration News.

Further to the ‘August’ edition of Aviation Tales, I recently made a visit to the Ashburton Aviation Museum, courtesy of my Canterbury based family. This was a kind of pilgrimage of sorts as I was an enthusiastic member of this great museum some 20 years ago.

My best experience back then was to be part of the team that imported and restored our own Harrier Jet (XZ129) and was pleased to view it proudly on display.

Goodness me, the progress there has been just amazing and a credit to all involved.

The new extension fits neatly between the existing buildings.

The new building is filling up already!

Greetings from my family. (December 2025)

This amazing expansion project, which began construction during January 2025, will increase the museum's total area from 3,000 to 5,000 square meters!

The new complex will bring all facilities under one roof and feature:

Expanded Display Area: The primary goal is to house the museum's extensive collection, including the items currently in storage.

Enhanced Visitor Facilities: Plans include a new reception area, a larger gift shop, a coffee kiosk overlooking the airfield, and improved kitchen and toilet facilities.

Mezzanine Floor: Construction of this area is now well underway above, and will house museum offices, archives, and an aviation library for members.

Strange but true aircraft that graced our skies in years gone by:

I have it on good authority; This is none other than:

The General Aircraft Fleet Shadower!

The G.A.L.38 Fleet Shadower was produced to meet Specification S.23/37, which came from the Royal Navy's "Operational Requirement OR.52.

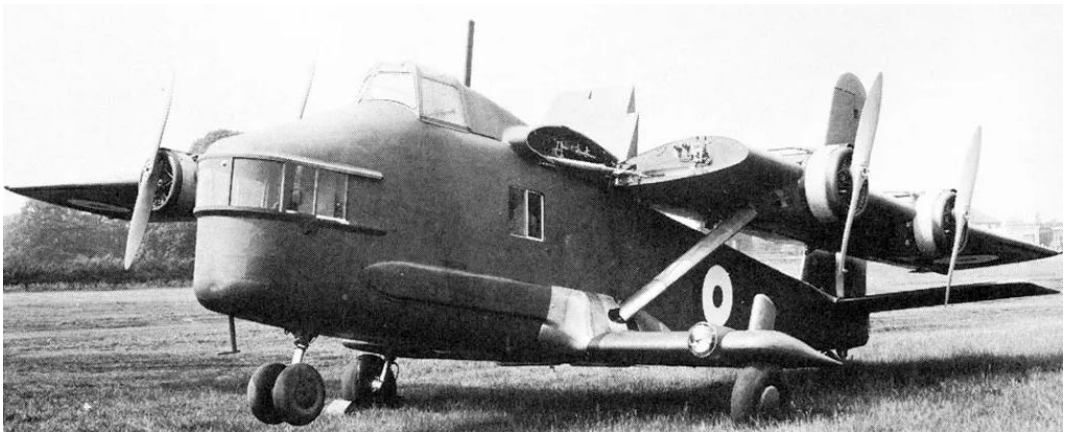
This requirement was for an aircraft which could ‘shadow’ enemy fleets at night.

Initially, four other companies were also involved: Percival, Short Brothers, Airspeed and Fairey Aviation.

Following evaluation of the designs General Aircraft was awarded a contract to build two prototypes and was dated 15 November 1938. The required performance was a cruise speed of 152 km/h at 1,500 feet with a stall speed of around 63 km/h, and a duration of not less than six hours.

The design would also have to be able to operate from an aircraft carrier and hence have a folding wing for easier deck storage. It would have to give good views for the observer and also be quiet at cruising speed!

The concept of a fleet patrol aircraft was superseded by the wartime development of effective Air to Surface (ASV) radar which could be fitted in long-range patrol aircraft such as the Consolidated Liberator I.



During February 1941, the Royal Navy cancelled the project!

Tailpiece

Quite a tale this time!

Guess you could say: 'Two burning one turning'!

This aircraft featured a pusher configuration in which two gas turbine engines powered a single constant-speed four-bladed propeller at the rear of the aircraft. A purpose-built gearbox allowed the two Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6B turboshaft engines to supply power via two independent driveshafts.

Sadly, The Lear Fan did not enter production. Structural problems were discovered during the pressurization check of the all-composite fuselage. The FAA refused to issue the prototype with an airworthiness certificate because of concerns that, despite having two engines, the combining-gearbox that drove the single propeller was not adequately reliable. Development was abandoned in 1985 after only three aircraft were built.

- Do you have any interesting aviation topics you would like to have mentioned in a future newsletter edition?

- Do any of the articles you have read in this newsletter edition require further explanation? Please ask 😊

This month's motivational statement:

"If you can walk away from a landing, it's a good landing. If you can use the aircraft the next day, it's an outstanding landing!"

'Chuck Yeager'

The 'Aviation Tales' newsletter is produced monthly

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