



## The 'Aviation Tales' Newsletter: October 2024.

So far, we have had an: excellent / windy / wet / disastrous / positive journey through Spring here on the Kapiti Coast.



*That's better!*

### Recent Aviation News.

- Earlier this month, the Chatham Islands entered the jet age with the first landing of a Texel Air Boeing 737, taking place there at the recently upgraded airport.



A TEXEL Air B737 cargo aircraft landed recently at the Chatham Islands "Tuuta" airport.

- "Don't forget, Marlborough Lines Classic Fighters is 'Putting on the Ritz' during next Easter Weekend 2025 at the Omas aerodrome.

Aircraft from the Golden Age of Aviation during the 1920s and 1930s will up the glamour stakes and grace the Marlborough skies. Book your tickets now for this spectacular Airshow!"

## Aviation Stories from the past

### *Good grief – What kind of aircraft is this?*



The Douglas XB-42A 'Mixmaster' Flew almost as fast as it looked.

When approached late in WW2, to develop a fast bomber, Douglas aircraft responded with their XB-42 design, a decidedly unconventional, piston-powered aircraft design that promised to achieve nearly 500 mph. Remember, this was during 1944!

After showing the initial design to the Army Air Force they certainly wanted it as a lower-cost, 'hedge' against the incredibly complex and costly B-29 Superfortress programme.

This aircraft design was anything but conventional, with a cylindrical fuselage and a huge cruciform tail with coaxial pusher propellers extending out of the rear of the fuselage.

The aircraft sat on a tricycle gear, which was exotic for the time, and the pilot and copilot sat under separate bubble canopies. The bomb aimer was seated in the aircraft's nose section.

A pair of Allison V-1710 inline V-12s that were coupled together through a complex drivetrain powered the XB-42 with the pusher-prop design giving the aircraft relatively uncluttered wings and a smooth fuselage, all helping to achieve the design speed of over 350 mph with the ability of reaching 410mph during a high-speed dash.

Considering that the aircraft could also carry 8,000 lbs of weapons and had a range approaching 2,000 miles, the XB-42 looked like it would become a huge success.

Jet engine technology however was on the way, leaving little room for piston engined designs. To mitigate this problem, a design change was developed to install a pair of Westinghouse turbojets of 1,600lbs of thrust each under the XB-42's clean wings.



This configuration was known as an XB-42A 'Mixmaster'.

## **Aviation Stories from the past. (Recently to hand)**

### **Mr Dave Cross and the “Ladybird”. An early homebuilt aircraft.**

I recently read this interesting story of an early homebuilt aircraft that I thought would be of interest to you all. This aircraft, known as ‘Ladybird’, was built during 1933 by a Southland local, Mr. Dave Cross of Chatton.



Dated 12th July 1933, an image of this early homebuilders achievement.

Dave Cross was reported as saying; “Anyone can build a plane provided he had such materials as a quantity of light wood, kerosene tins, old motor car number plates, stout cloth and a coil or two of wire!”

### **On 24 May 1933 the Otago Daily Times reported:**

"Some months ago it was hoped to take the machine into the air, but the engine with which it was then equipped; a four-cylinder motor cycle engine, was not sufficiently powerful to lift the plane. The young aviator finally obtained an older JAP V4 engine imported from England by a Mr Pither of Invercargill for aviation purposes.

This engine was overhauled and found to be in good order and after some alterations and it was installed in the machine.

Much study and energy had been devoted to the construction of a small monoplane at Chatton, Eastern Southland, when a very proud young man named David Cecil Cross, made his first successful trial flights in the machine.

In the presence of about 20 onlookers the monoplane was taken out on Sunday morning and the young man took his place at the controls.

The machine took off beautifully, crossed the Washpool Creek and a row of tall poplar trees, reached an altitude of 200 feet and made a good landing”.

The return journey was commenced a few minutes later and would have been equally successful had not one of the wheels struck a log of wood which was almost hidden in the ground.

"A wheel was torn off and a certain amount of damage was done to the undercarriage, but the pilot was uninjured. Naturally the young man was very proud of his achievement, although the slight mishap at the end of the trial was a disappointment to him. The monoplane has a wing span of 29 feet and on account of its graceful lines has been called the 'Ladybird'. Despite its age, the engine now installed is in excellent order."

He made several more flights including one of 14km and he was the first man to be prosecuted in New Zealand for flying without a licence.

The Ladybird finally crashed in a turnip paddock and the remains can now be seen in the Croydon Aviation Heritage Centre at Mandeville.



## Restoration News



Photo: with thanks - Nate McKinnon

This historic P-3K2 Orion aircraft has been retired after 54 years of RNZAF service.

This particular aircraft, NZ4203, has flown some 27,000 flying hours during its career and will be the only Orion from the RNZAF's fleet of six to be conserved.

The origins of the Lockheed Orion date back to 1957 when the United States Navy identified the need for a replacement for their Lockheed Neptune and Martin Marlin maritime patrol aircraft.



Photo: with thanks – Arthur Schulz

An evocative image of a TEAL Lockheed L-188 at Christchurch taken during the early 1960's

A more advanced aircraft was required that was capable of both maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare. At the time, Lockheed had the Electra airliner in the early stages of flight testing, and they put forward a proposal to develop a military version of this aircraft.

An initial research and development contract was awarded by the United States Navy in April 1958 and the first prototype flew in August the same year.

The first US operational aircraft entered service in April 1961.

Since then, the Orion has gone on to operate with 20 military services world-wide, including our own Royal New Zealand Air Force.

The New Zealand Government ordered five new Orion aircraft in March 1964 as part of a plan to modernise the RNZAF. At a total cost of £8 million, these aircraft represented a considerable increase in capability over the World War Two era Short Sunderland flying boats that they were replacing.

Deliveries of our Orion's took place between September and December 1966, having their anti-submarine warfare capability upgraded in 1968. This this equipment was regularly updated to keep pace with technology advances.

By the time these aircraft were retired in 2023, they had provided fifty-seven years of uninterrupted service to New Zealand.

Built by Lockheed in Burbank California during 1966, NZ4203 entered service with the RNZAF in April 1967.

By the time this aircraft was retired from service in 2021, it had completed 27,000 hours of flying while carrying out patrols of New Zealand's EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone), taking part in military exercises and operational deployments around the world, and saving many lives while on search and rescue duties.

NZ4203 has now had long-term preservation work completed so it can be safely stored while the RNZAF museum staff work on plans for a new permanent exhibition space large enough to house it.

With a tail height of 10.3m and a wingspan of 30.4m, the Orion is too large for the present exhibition spaces.

It is also too large for its current hangar, which is why it has been stored with its empennage (tail section) and its submarine hunting magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) boom removed.

NZ4203 will be preserved at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand as the only surviving RNZAF example of the type.



Photo: with thanks – Grant Newman.

An impressive aircraft from any angle, The 'Orion' exuded power, capability and no doubt relief to any unfortunate person adrift at sea when an Orion aircraft roared into view.

## Tailpiece



The “sting in the tail”

The distinctive Orion ‘tail’ housed the AN/ASQ-81 magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) equipment that was used to detect and track submerged submarines.

- Do you have any interesting aviation topics you would like mentioned in future newsletter edition?
- Have any of the articles you have read in this newsletter edition require further explanation?

### **This month’s motivational statement:**

“They say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”

Andy Warhol

The ‘Aviation Tales’ newsletter is produced monthly

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