

Inaugural Air Show success

STORY AND PICS ALAN BETTERIDGE

WATTS Bridge was home to the inaugural Brisbane Valley Air Show in August and the decision to change from the popular Gathering of Eagles fly-in to a full blown, two day air show was a success.

The decision was not taken lightly by the organising committee but the move was rewarded by the large crowds which attended.

Thousands of people flocked to the event both on the Saturday and Sunday, with many arriving on the Friday and taking advantage of the camping facilities.

It is interesting to note the majority of people who decided to fly in did so on Saturday, with

many departing during the scheduled break in the display at lunch time.

One couple who flew down on Saturday and set up camp under the wing of their Jabiru J230 were Col and Donna Johnston.

Col, who is a member of the Isis Flying Club, took just over one hour to fly down from Childers, near Bundaberg.

"I learned to fly with Russ Middleton at Pro-Sky Aviation in Maryborough four years ago and have never looked back," Col said.

"Both my wife and I love flying and purchased our Jab about three and half years ago."

The only problem they encountered – as did

everyone who camped overnight – was the cold.

"The days are superb but it was only three degrees this morning," he laughed. "But we survived."

The ever jovial Julie Hands from Heathrow Field on the Whitsunday Coast decided to build the air show into her and partner Ian Wells' trip around Queensland in their treasured Savannah XL, appropriately named Cab Sav.

"We are on the final leg of our circumnavigation of Queensland," Julie said.

"We flew right around the border, with a few side deviations into the Northern Territory and South Australia.

"The trip has taken us four weeks and has



Ready for action – Nieuport 17 and Sopwith Pup



Very neat and tidy RV12



Builder extraordinaire Bruce Clarke with his latest creation



Well-travelled Savannah XL



L39, Yak 3 and P41 Mustang each put on impressive displays



been fantastic.”

Julie, Ian and Cab Sav are no strangers to long distance travel. They have flown around Australia three times already - and are not showing any signs of stopping their travels anytime soon.

“I don’t know where we will go next – but we will go somewhere, that’s for sure.”

Asked about the unusual name of her Savannah she said it was simple really:

“Our little aeroplane is just like Cabernet Sauvignon – a smooth wine that travels well.”

Mike Saunders, a member of the Callide Dawson Flying Group from Mackay, flew down to meet up with the Cab Sav crew and accompany them back.

This was Mike’s longest trip since completing his Nynja in October 2015.

“I have 80 hours total flight time. This is my longest trip yet and it went really well,” he said.

“It gets along at about 90kts and the trip took me 4.7 hours to get here. The Nynja is the perfect aircraft for me and I love it.”

Another intrepid aviator who flew over from Heck Field on the Gold Coast in his unmissable lime green X-Air was Jason King.

“It took about 50 minutes to make the trip and weather is just unbelievable,” he said.

Two of the big crowd pleasers on static display were the Sopwith Pup and Nieuport 17, belonging to Bruce Clarke.



An exciting newcomer to the RAAus fleet is the Bat Hawk from South African company Micro Aviation



Bruce is a well-known aircraft builder and mentor to many others in the process of building their own aircraft.

"The Nieuport 17 is built from plans which were up-scaled by the late Graham Lee from Canada," Bruce said.

"I had to make a few minor changes but I think the end result was worth the trouble."

Bruce's long suffering wife Mary said she wished he would just stop building aeroplanes because she was the one who did all the rib stitching on the fabric – not an easy task.

"Rib stitching is a dying art and Mary is very good at it – she loves it really."

Mary just laughed and shook her head at her husband's comments.

RAAus had a presence at the show and held an information forum for members.

CEO Michael Linke, Secretary Tony King and Assistant Operations Manager Neil Schaefer explained to a small but enthusiastic crowd about the changes in the pipeline for the organisation.

Tony explained the push to get a new category of aircraft with a MTOW of 1,500kg - to be called group G.

"The group G aircraft will be a separate category from our current groups, in particular group A.

"As we all know, group A has a MTOW of 600kg but must have a stall speed of no more than 45kts.

"It is the stall speed factor which is the key."

Michael said the new category would not affect any current category A aircraft unless the owners wanted to.

"If owners want to keep doing what they have been doing that's fine, there will be no changes," Michael said.

The forum also discussed the current state of play with the plan to give RAAus registered aircraft access to CTA.

Tony said the process was underway and members would see the results soon.

"We have a situation where many of our members learn to fly at controlled airports and so know the procedures, but as soon as they get a Certificate they can't fly in there anymore. That simply doesn't make sense," he said.

In closing Michael said the next six months would bring some great changes and members would be fully informed as they happened.

"All I can say is that it will be an exciting six months ahead."

The decision to change from a fly-in to an air show was clearly popular with the people who attended and the organisers should be proud of what they achieved.

But I can't help feeling that the air show lacked one thing the old Gathering of Eagles fly-in had in spades – a feeling of comradery and easy going.

Maybe it was the perceived threat of the ever watchful eye of CASA staff, or the many CASA induced restrictions on where you could and could not go, which made the difference.

Either way it was different and maybe thought should be given to holding another GoE style fly-in during the year in conjunction with the Brisbane Valley Air Show. ☺

Col and Donna Johnston flew from Childers in their J230 Jabiru in near perfect weather



A small, but enthusiastic, crowd attended the RAAus forum to hear about some exciting changes coming for the organisation

